

# LA TROBEANA



**Journal of the C. J. La Trobe Society Inc.**

**Vol 23, No 1, March 2024**

ISSN 1447-4026

## ***La Trobeana***

**Journal of the C J La Trobe Society Inc**  
**Vol 23, No 1, March 2024**

ISSN 1447-4026

The C J La Trobe Society Inc was formed in 2001 to promote understanding and appreciation of the life, work and times of Charles Joseph La Trobe, Victoria's first Lieutenant-Governor.  
[www.latrobesociety.org.au](http://www.latrobesociety.org.au)

*La Trobeana* is published three times a year: in March, July and November. The journal publishes peer-reviewed articles, as well as other written contributions, that explore themes in the life and times of Charles Joseph La Trobe, aspects of the colonial period of Victoria's history, and the wider La Trobe family.



### **Editorial Committee**

Helen Armstrong and Dianne Reilly (Honorary Editors)  
Helen Botham, Loreen Chambers, Susan Priestley, Fay Woodhouse

### **Picture Editor**

John Botham

### **Designer**

Michael Owen [michaelowen.mto@gmail.com](mailto:michaelowen.mto@gmail.com)

### **For copies of guidelines for contributors and subscription enquiries contact:**

The Honorary Secretary: Dr Dianne Reilly AM  
The C J La Trobe Society  
P O Box 65  
Port Melbourne Vic 3207  
Phone: 0412 517 061  
Email: [secretary@latrobesociety.org.au](mailto:secretary@latrobesociety.org.au)

### **FRONT COVER**

Thomas Woolner, 1825-1892, sculptor  
Charles Joseph La Trobe, 1853  
Bronze portrait medallion showing the left profile of Charles Joseph La Trobe, diam. 24cm.  
Signature and date incised in bronze l.r.: T. Woolner Sc. 1853: / M  
La Trobe, Charles Joseph, 1801-1875. Accessioned 1894  
Pictures Collection, State Library Victoria, H5489

# Contents

---

**4**    *A Word from the President*

## Articles

**5**    Deborah Towns  
*To Be Good? Educating Girls in  
the La Trobe era*

**16**   Lorraine Finlay  
*Georgina Bell's Journal: Mercantile life  
in Melbourne 1845 to 1860*

**24**   Tim Gatehouse  
*The American Ancestors of the La Trobe  
Family revisited*

## Reports and Notices

**28**   La Trobe Artworks

**29**   La Trobe Family Portraits

**30**   Forthcoming events

**31**   Contributions welcome

## A Word from the President

---

It may come as quite a surprise to realise that our esteemed journal *La Trobeana* has been published by the La Trobe Society for twenty-two years. Following the inauguration of the Society in 2001, it was first issued as *La Trobeana: Newsletter of the La Trobe Society of Australia* in 2002. It appeared in its current format as *La Trobeana: Journal of the C J La Trobe Society Inc* in August 2006.

From the first issue, *La Trobeana* has been deposited under legal deposit at State Library Victoria and at the National Library of Australia where it is preserved and made available to researchers as part of a lasting record of Victoria's and Australia's publishing history. Full text of each issue of *La Trobeana* is accessible on the La Trobe Society's website. The National Library of Australia's online library database Trove provides a link to our journal via the website.

We have been tremendously fortunate in the calibre of our successive editors. Dr Fay Woodhouse was founding editor with the March 2002 edition, a role she continued with great skill and diligence, her final issue appearing in April 2006. Loreen Chambers brought her flair and experience as a history teacher to the role from July 2009 until the edition of March 2015. Helen Armstrong, our current accomplished editor, took over the reins in July 2015. On your behalf, I thank all three of them for the invaluable work they have done and continue to do to promote La Trobe in the community.

I am reliably assured by members of the Editorial Committee that there is never a shortage of quality material from reputable authors for our publication. In this edition, you will be interested to read Dr Deborah Towns article 'To Be Good? Educating Girls in the La Trobe Era', an edited version of her presentation at last year's Annual General Meeting.

Lorraine Finlay's research on 'Georgina Bell's Journal: Mercantile Life in Melbourne 1845-1860' reveals first impressions and development of the family's business and domestic life. In his article 'The American Ancestors of the La Trobe Family Revisited', Tim Gatehouse gives us the benefit of more information about the Antes family in the La Trobe family heritage.

Helen Armstrong's two reports provide us with up-to-date information on the conservation of the two original La Trobe Family Portraits which we will be able to view at the La Trobe birthday celebration at the Cottage on 17 March, and she gives us recent access details for the National Trust's holdings of La Trobe Artworks.

**Diane Gardiner AM**  
**Hon President**  
**C J La Trobe Society**

# To Be Good? Educating Girls in the La Trobe era

By Dr Deborah Towns OAM

Deborah is a senior research fellow writing biographies and historical stories for the Faculty of Business and Economics, University of Melbourne's Centenary Project. In 2022, at the Royal Historical Society of Victoria's conference 'Free Secular Compulsory: 150th Anniversary of the Victorian Education Act 1872', she delivered the keynote address. Deborah shared the 2018 Collaborative Community History Award with co-author Dr John Andrews for *A Secondary Education for All? A History of State Secondary Schooling in Victoria* (2017).

*This is an edited version of an address given at the Annual General Meeting of the C J La Trobe Society on 17 August 2023 at the Alexandra Club, Melbourne.*

During the La Trobe era, almost 200 years ago, women actively played a role in the education of girls and boys. However, before the colonial settlers, Aboriginal women elders had taught their daughters and granddaughters their strong ancestral culture of thousands of years. They continue to do so as teachers in classrooms and as leaders in the wider community. Since early settler society, women have undertaken multiple roles in education as governesses, teachers in city and country schools, and school headmistresses. They have taught in tents on the goldfields, and served as pioneering businesswomen of ladies' academies, as lecturers in teachers' colleges, professors and deans in the education faculties of universities, and as Ministers of Education. Teaching stays as a popular career for women and they make up most of the teachers in independent, Catholic and public schools. As for the girls' curriculum, needlework prevailed as compulsory for many girls into the 1960s. At secondary school then, I had a needlework sample book, made a petticoat, embroidered a 'housecoat', and sewed a cookery apron and cap for the following year's domestic science classes. Today all subjects and careers are open to girls and most schools are coeducational, though girls' schools continue to be popular.

\*\*\*

The woman claimed to be Port Phillip's first teacher was governess Caroline Elizabeth Newcomb. She accompanied John and Eliza Batman's family of seven daughters from

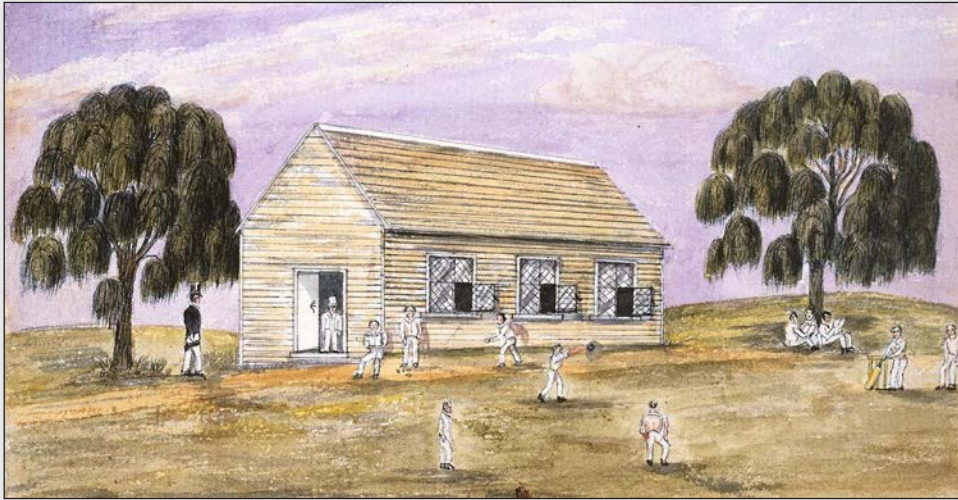


Batchelder & Co., photographer  
Caroline Dodgson, née Newcomb,  
c.1870 (detail)

Uniting Church Archives, Synod of Victoria, F678-2

Launceston to the Port Phillip District in 1836.<sup>1</sup> An independent immigrant, she met Batman in 1833. 'Cultivated' and 'God-fearing', she was the ideal woman teacher for the Victorian era.<sup>2</sup> Newcomb was one of the few women in Port Phillip's nascent, masculine domain; her classroom was in Batman's home on a pleasant hill to the west of the settlement.<sup>3</sup> Batman was also instrumental in the establishment of Port Phillip's first ladies' academy.<sup>4</sup> In 1837 he built a second house on the corner of Flinders and





Wilbraham Frederick Evelyn Liardet, 1799–1878, artist  
**St James' Church and School (1838), 1875**  
 Watercolour, pencil, pen and ink  
 Pictures Collection, State Library Victoria, H28250/15

Swanston Streets,<sup>5</sup> but Newcomb left Melbourne soon afterwards,<sup>6</sup> and the enterprising Nichola Cooke replaced her. Cooke rented Batman's new house, *Roxburgh*, and founded her Ladies' Seminary, with boarding facilities, in 1838.<sup>7</sup> It is reputed to be the first school for girls in Port Phillip, making Cooke Port Phillip's first headmistress.

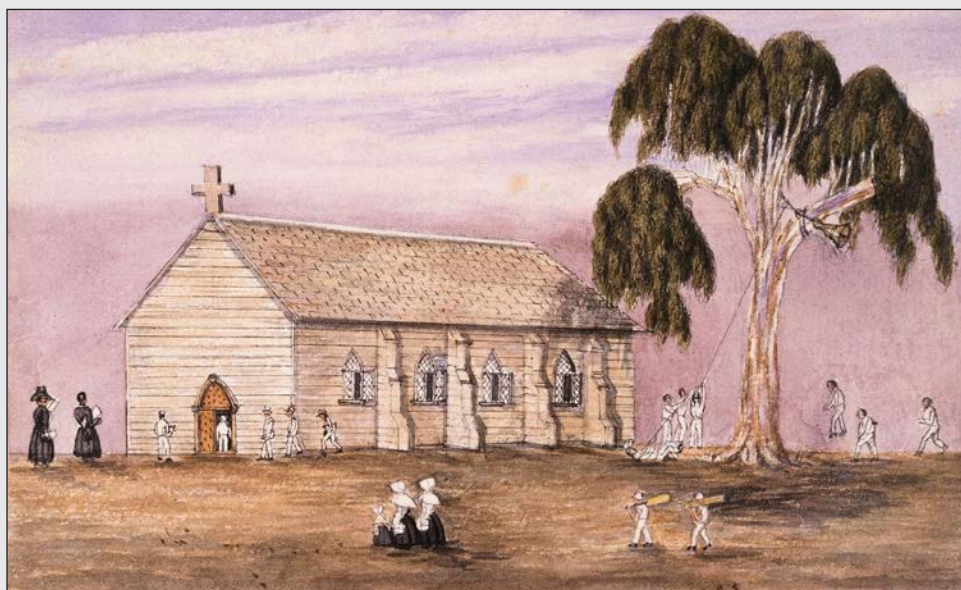
Girls were taught by women teachers like Newcomb and Cooke during the La Trobe era. A 'God fearing' and law-abiding citizenry was a main objective of the church and state, and schooling reflected this. For the élite or wealthier immigrants, education was also a status symbol. Schooling consisted of not only religious and moral teaching, but reading, writing and arithmetic skills, with additional subjects to cultivate the mind and to prepare them for future high office. Although these girls shared in the classical, liberal education offered to boys, their future was ideally restricted to the home. Their education prepared them to be ladies of the upper echelons of society, exhibiting a high moral tone and a cultivated home for their husband and children. They learnt about home management, supervising servants, and studied moral and social graces. Depending upon what their parents could afford, girls were taught from the 'accomplishments' curriculum.

Education for the working class gained a new focus as public schooling acquired heightened attention from the 1830s. Melbourne's foundation in 1835 occurred in the decade when colonial governments funded, legislated for and administered education. The ruling class recognised not only the need for

high moral values but the economic need for a literate and numerate workforce.<sup>8</sup> The New South Wales 1836 *Church Act* promoted the advancement of Christianity and the promotion of good morals; consequently, land grants were made for churches and schools. With this incentive, Port Phillip's church, government and community leaders envisioned Melbourne's public elementary schools for girls and boys as marked on early maps.<sup>9</sup> Seven school building sites were set aside for the Church of England, the Catholic Church, the Scots' Church, the Wesleyan Church and the Independent Church.<sup>10</sup> The government would provide partial funding for the establishment and maintenance of these schools, so they were public elementary schools.<sup>11</sup>

Girls were expected to attend these early public elementary schools for the working class. The students were the sons and daughters of factory workers, domestic servants, shopkeepers and small farmers. However, all these schools receiving government funding catered for both girls and boys.<sup>12</sup> Many were 'coeducational' but the ideal was for girls to be taught in separate rooms or buildings. A curtained off area in the classroom was often practised. Men and women teachers were employed as headmasters and assistant teachers.

After Captain Lonsdale's first visit to Melbourne in 1836 he reported on the private schools, and new churches and schools were funded.<sup>13</sup> The first two public elementary schools opened in 1838: one in the small Church of England building on St James' reserve, on the corner of William and Little Collins Streets,



**Wilbraham Frederick Evelyn Liardet, 1799–1878, artist**  
**St Francis Church and School (1839), 1875**  
 Watercolour, with pen and ink  
 Pictures Collection, State Library Victoria, H28250/16

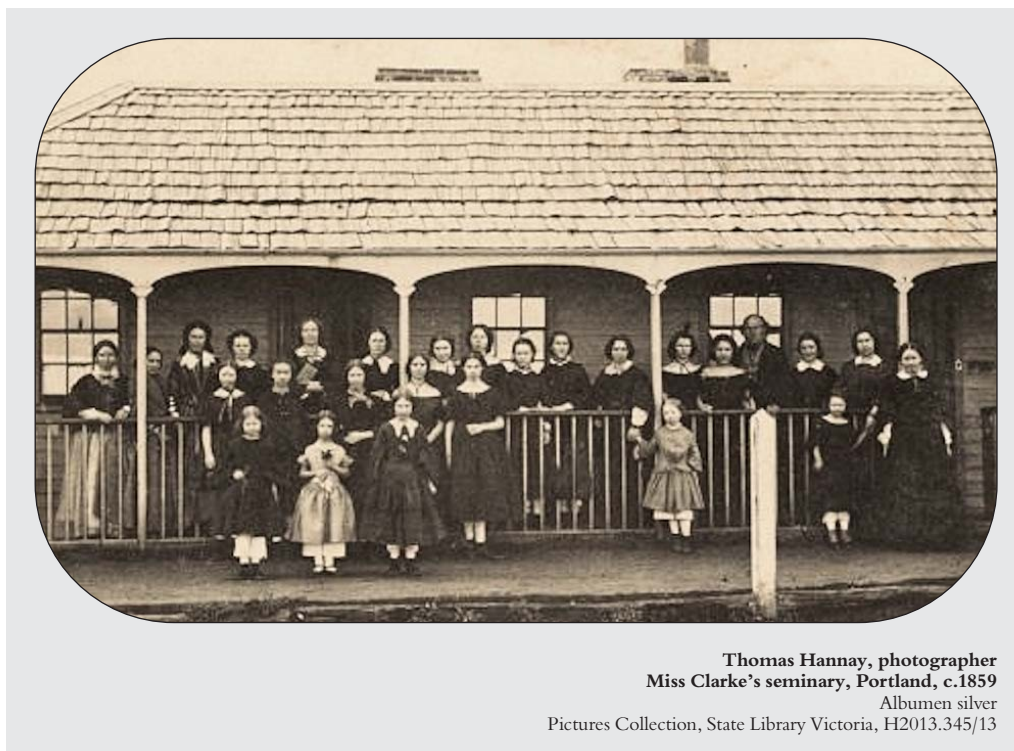
and the second was the Scots' School near the corner of Collins and Russell Streets.<sup>14</sup> The Church of England school closed and reopened the next year. It advertised as a school for both sexes where children were taught English, reading and spelling for one shilling per week. English grammar and geography were included, while writing and arithmetic were extra. Private tuition was also available.<sup>15</sup> As with the education for upper-class girls, so it was preferred that girls in the new public elementary schools followed a restricted and narrow curriculum compared with the boys. They were taught writing, arithmetic (to division), lessons on the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, church catechism and sewing.<sup>16</sup> Private schools of the 'less-select kind' provided education to the daughters of working-class parents who could afford the fees and preferred to educate their daughters in girls' schools.<sup>17</sup>

Schools for Aboriginal girls and boys were also established. Colonial leaders aimed to 'civilise' and 'Christianise' Aboriginal children through education. In December 1836 a small school for the Woi Wurrung and Bunurong children was established by George Langhorne near where the Royal Botanic Gardens are today. From 1838 schools were provided at Narre Warren, Merri Creek and the Buntingale Mission some distance from Geelong.<sup>18</sup> These schools aimed to put an end to Aboriginal children acquiring their traditional education as they had done continuously for thousands of years. Their established oral educational system

focussed on the learning of culture and life skills, taught by their elders. Girls learnt about how to care for the family, and helped their mothers to supply over half of the family's food, and other skills such as fishing and sailing a boat. They learnt traditional songs, beliefs, legends, dances, and games.<sup>19</sup>

Superintendent La Trobe disembarked in 1839, just as the early schools were attracting attention. He arrived with his wife Sophie and two-year-old daughter Agnes, who would eventually require formal education. Port Phillip's settler population had quickly increased from a few hundred when the Batmans arrived to approximately 5,000 only three years later.<sup>20</sup> Women made up a little over ten per cent of the population. It was a gendered place to be, not only because of the ratio of men and women, but for the all-male leadership, typical of the period.

Within La Trobe's portfolio, 'the state of the Aborigines and the relations between them and the settlers' was one of 'the most important subjects to which his attention should be directed'.<sup>21</sup> He took a particular interest in the Merri Creek school. The headmaster Edward Peacock and his wife Rebecca taught the children literacy skills, and the girls learnt needlework and housework.<sup>22</sup> After a visit to the school, La Trobe was 'deeply impressed' and donated personally to support it.<sup>23</sup> However, by 1848 he reported to the Colonial Secretary that the four protectorates and the Aboriginal schools and other religious and government institutional



activities designed to 'Christianise' them had failed.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, on the subject of law and order, he claimed the mounted Native Police Corps as a success.

Within months of arriving, La Trobe requested the clergy, whose salaries were paid by the Colonial Treasury, to report on their churches and schools. The Church of England had 30 male and 20 female students, the Presbyterians 70 males and 49 females, and the Catholics 20 males and 20 females.<sup>25</sup> Married teaching couples taught, such as John and Mary Lynch who shared teaching at the Catholic School.

Wealthier educated families often tutored their children, especially their daughters, at home or in girls' private schools. They sent their older children to established Sydney schools or overseas. The long-standing settler and diarist Georgiana McCrae included references to teaching her daughters and sons and wanting to send her older boys back 'home' for their education.<sup>26</sup>

As Melbourne and regional towns grew, opportunities increased for elementary education with governesses and tutors, private schools (some with appropriate boarding accommodation) and smaller home-based establishments, sometimes named 'dame schools'. In addition to church schools, as well as denominational and later national and secondary grammar-style schools, independent schools were established. Larger

privately-owned 'young ladies' schools' flourished in the mid-nineteenth century and could be owned by women or married couples. Parents who could afford to, paid for 'accomplishments' that consisted of two main elements: the first was a comprehensive program in all the elements of the English language – literature, grammar, composition, elocution, and calligraphy – with history, geography and arithmetic. The second was the elements of natural science and cultural studies of music, art, and the modern languages. They were also offered dancing, gymnastics, callisthenics and crafts, together with piano lessons which were considered important in that era.<sup>27</sup>

Referring to private schools, historian Marjorie Theobald found, 'Over seven hundred such schools advertised in the Melbourne *Argus* between 1840 and 1870 and that number may be increased by reference to suburban and provincial newspapers.'<sup>28</sup> For example, Richard and Rachel Hedditch advertised for three years from 1842 in the *Portland Guardian and Normanby General Advertiser*. They taught the basics of reading, writing, arithmetic, and geography, and plain and ornamental embroidery, charging separately for each subject.<sup>29</sup>

Nichola Cooke's seminary continued. Following her, the entrepreneurial Elizabeth McArthur established her first Melbourne school on the corner of Russell Street and Flinders Lane in 1839.<sup>30</sup> Her next school followed the wealthy settlers seeking cleaner air and building mansions in St Kilda. In 1878,



McArthur's generous obituary, headed 'A Good and Useful Woman', highly praised her for living the 'uneventful life of a schoolmistress'.<sup>31</sup> Today we might read this 'praise' as somewhat derogatory, as her four decades as a successful businesswoman were ignored.

The influential, sophisticated Anne Gilbert (the former Lady Byerly) established her girls' school at the Melbourne Mechanics' Institute in Collins Street in 1843.<sup>32</sup> The La Trobes had a cosmopolitan and cultured background, so her school appealed to them for Agnes. Anne Gilbert was also proficient in French. She and her husband George Gilbert taught both girls and young boys. Employing expert male and female tutors was a feature of the private girls' schools.

Whether in a classroom or the home, children's literature played an important part in their education. Traditional stories like *Mother Goose's Nursery Rhymes* were universally popular. Children also learnt to read the *Bible*. As more children were becoming educated, canny authors introduced a steady supply of adventure stories and didactic books including religious salvation and social and cultural morals. May we assume that girls read their brothers' adventure books? As Victorian literature directed girls and women to their appropriate behaviour, girls' books told stories of lady-like behaviours and obedience.<sup>33</sup> The celebrated nineteenth-century English author, Hannah Moore, believed that separate spheres for men and women was permanent, and her books encouraged upper-class women to act as productive, educated and morally responsible citizens. Colonial author, Charlotte Barton's, *A Mother's Offering to Her Children*, is recognised as the first locally-produced book for children in Australia.<sup>34</sup> Published anonymously in 1841, it is in the mode of a moral tract. In the same vein was *Letters on Education addressed to a friend in the Bush of Australia*, published in 1848, by another Australian writer Hannah Villiers Boyd.<sup>35</sup> She signalled to the mothers of Australia, 'to teach the Europeans a practical moral lesson', and to 'do their duty'. Even so, many Victorian children's stories were designed to amuse and instruct.<sup>36</sup>

Books were expensive, so the denominational and national school boards agreed to import, in bulk, the Irish national series of readers and textbooks for their students. They may also have been used in private schools. There were different books for girls, including a dedicated needlework text with samples. The boards endeavoured to provide each student with a reader. These books show what the early colonists wanted children to learn about the moral and social values of the time. Over 30,000 Irish national texts were imported by the boards

for their schools between 1848 until 1861, which was when the Common School system was established.<sup>37</sup> Schools were provided with readers, textbooks, slate pencils, blackboards, quills, copy books, writing manuals and other requisites. Parents paid a small fee and teachers were paid by the boards.

The Irish national readers and textbooks were non-denominational but Christian, and intoned moral and ethical advice to children, including keeping their trust in God. Needlework textbooks also presented a moral tone. Teachers were informed by textbooks to use drill and rote learning methods. Girls were encouraged to be submissive.<sup>38</sup> The girls and boys followed separate timetables with a different curriculum. Older students assisted as class monitors. Boys' reading lessons included analysis. In the fourth class, while girls practised writing, boys studied tables, definitions or rules of arithmetic. Girls finished school in the fourth level while boys continued into the fifth class where they studied additional subjects including algebra and bookkeeping. Every afternoon for eighty minutes, girls in first, second, third or fourth class were taught sewing, knitting, mending, cutting out, plain and fancy working. Boys in the same class learnt mathematical mensuration and geometry.<sup>39</sup>

Learning needlework was important for women and girls in the nineteenth century.<sup>40</sup> As historian Catherine Gay states, 'Working-class, middling and well-to-do girls across the continent made needlework items'.<sup>41</sup> (See picture next page.) The practical knowledge of needlework must be regarded as very useful for all females, if applied to domestic purposes. Georgiana McCrae discussed home-mending in her diaries. For working-class women, it enabled remunerative work.<sup>42</sup> Needlework was compulsory for girls into the 1960s.

In the mid-nineteenth century however, during school hours, girls had less opportunities than boys to study academic work as they practised needlework or other crafts for the equivalent of one day each week. Women teachers were expected to teach needlework as well as other subjects, while male teachers gained a part-time needlework mistress who could also be their wife. 'Fortunately,' historian Norman Curry suggests 'as most schools were mixed, girls may have received more academic opportunities than if they were separated'.<sup>43</sup>

In 1845, the La Trobes chose to send Agnes to Europe to continue her education. Her father considered that she was 'being allowed to run wild at Jolimont'.<sup>44</sup> When he wrote to her, he reflected the educational aims of religious



**Maria Caroline Brownrigg, 1812–1880, artist**  
**An evening at Yarra Cottage, Port Stephens, 1857**

Watercolour with collage on paper  
 National Portrait Gallery, Canberra, 2017.130  
 Family group with daughters pictured by their mother sewing

and community leaders of the era: 'We have been greatly cheered by the recent letters of your dear Aunt Rose giving us intelligence of your progress in obedience and docility... and we rejoice and believe that dear Agnes will become a consciously good and God-fearing child'.<sup>45</sup> The younger children, Eleanora, Cécile and Charles, were educated by a governess at home or at a local school, before they departed with their mother for Europe in 1853.

Over the previous decade, educational institutions had increased in number as settlers poured into Port Phillip. The colonial government's first schools' regulation took effect from 1 January 1842, designed to bring all schools that received government grants into one system. Private schools continued without such aid. Parents were requested to pay a penny a day, but some could not pay. Some families were subsidised, but extreme poverty led to Hester Hornbrook establishing her 'ragged schools' from 1859. Ragged Schools were based on the British Ragged Schools system. At its peak the Hornbrook Ragged School Association in Melbourne offered 1,000 children in twelve schools a basic education with an emphasis on biblical and practical instruction.

Public church schools were required to report regularly to the government. By 1842 they had a gross enrolment of 501 (Melbourne 379 and outside Melbourne 122, in Williamstown, Geelong and Portland). Private school enrolments in Melbourne, totalled

257 children. The total of 758 girls and boys attending school was less than one-third of the school-age population.<sup>46</sup>

In 1844 a New South Wales government enquiry into the provision of education was established. Representing the Port Phillip District, pastoralist Alexander Mollison was a witness to the Select Committee into Poor Children. He and the Committee overwhelmingly condemned the denominational system as wasteful.<sup>47</sup> Despite such findings, Church of England and Catholic leaders were against changes to the system so a dual, partially government-funded arrangement developed from 1848. Schools were overseen by two boards, the Board of National Education alongside the Denominational Board, both based in Sydney.

The aim to provide rural schooling inspired the wealthy pastoralists, the Learmonth family, to establish a private boarding school for girls and boys in Buninyong, near Ballarat, in 1847. It was overseen by Rev. Thomas Hastie and his wife. Thomas Learmonth paid Hastie's stipend and credited La Trobe for his proposed support through the government estimates. In the first year it had 51 boarders and day students. The matron taught reading, writing and arithmetic, and the girls sewing and knitting; 'it being thought that habits of industry and orderliness form also a most important part of education, all the children are required, so far as they are able, to perform the housework and assist the matron'.<sup>48</sup>



Unknown photographer  
**Flinders State School, Geelong (1858), c.1880**  
 Wynd Collection, courtesy Susie Zada, South Geelong  
 Originally named Flinders National Grammar School  
 Currently known as Matthew Flinders Girls Secondary College

Learmonth suggested such boarding schools should be established throughout the bush and argued, 'It becomes every Christian man and every Christian master to labor for the accomplishment of this object, for until the Gospel is preached everywhere throughout the length and breadth of the land, and until instruction is easily procurable for the young, the conditions of our shepherds and other bush laborers will not be improved'.<sup>49</sup>

In 1849 at its anniversary meeting attended by La Trobe, the Church of England's Diocesan Society proudly reported it had five schools in Melbourne. It described the St James' schools for boys and girls as 'under an excellent master and mistress' with 99 boys and 61 girls. The Russell Street school had 93 boys and 65 girls. The Swanston Street school for infants had 110 children 'under the charge of an excellent and experienced mistress'; the Stephen (Exhibition) Street schools had 55 boys, 56 girls and 74 infants, while the Collingwood schools had 63 boys, 55 girls and 66 infants.<sup>50</sup>

The planned National Schools were Christian but not a particular denomination, though visiting clergy could provide religious instruction. The first erected was the Bacchus Marsh National School in 1850 and today it is Victoria's oldest continuing public school. As churches were not subsidising these schools, local parents and community leaders were expected to make up the difference.

Following Port Phillip's separation from New South Wales in 1851, His Excellency the Lieutenant-Governor of Victoria, Charles Joseph La Trobe immediately gave assent to establish Victoria's National Board of Education. This body commenced a local Review of Education. It found Denominational schools were teaching in seventy-four schools with 2,165 boys and 1,705 girls enrolled; and in seven National schools there were already 151 boys and 134 girls. In the ninety-nine private schools there were 1,285 boys and 1,367 girls. This made a total of 180 schools, with 3,601 boys and 3,206 girls. Like the New South Wales 1844 review, the duplication and wastage of funds in the denominational sector was stark. George Rusden, a Review witness, was the government agent responsible for establishing the national system and he showed prescience in 1852 when he stated, 'a secular system will ultimately be the law of the land'.<sup>51</sup>

With the discovery of gold, children's learning was disrupted in various ways. Families left their homes for the goldfields. Male teachers left classrooms, seeking greater riches than teaching provided. If the schools stayed open, women teachers took charge. Private schools without students closed and women lost their livelihoods. As historian Donald Rankin writes, the numbers of private schools quickly declined. Of the ninety-nine in 1850, there were only seventeen with 472 students in 1852.<sup>52</sup>





Unknown photographer  
Old Model School Melbourne (1854), c.1865

Royal Historical Society of Victoria collection

Demolished 1933, now the site of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons

Historian John Barnes, one of La Trobe's biographers, writes that La Trobe would share the common community belief that goldfields 'tended to the demoralization of society'.<sup>53</sup> Churches and schools were funded to keep moral and social order on the goldfields. Advertisements brought teachers to the goldfields, national and denominational schools were quickly established, and male and female teachers received a higher salary paid by the government.<sup>54</sup> Large tents were used in the early 1850s as classrooms with room for 100 children. In Ballarat, the Humffray Street National School on Bakery Hill had 130 children by 1853.<sup>55</sup> One of its teachers Anna Harrington was noted as one of the women who participated in the Eureka Stockade rebellion. She attended to the wounded at the request of Father Patrick Smyth, a hero at the rebellion.<sup>56</sup>

By 1858, there were 107 denominational schools on the diggings catering for different religions, but only about 6,500 children attending out of an estimated 36,000.<sup>57</sup> National schools had increased from seventeen in 1856 to fifty-two by 1862,<sup>58</sup> while private schools were assumed to be numerous. Children were not always able to take advantage of the educational opportunities because families were often itinerant and children were expected to work at gold panning or child minding.

The Kyneton *Observer* echoed the growing sentiment that was moving away from denominational schools, remarking that 'A thoroughly National system' is required 'so as to embrace every grade of society'.<sup>59</sup> By 1857, gradually children of varied denominations attended national schools as they were gaining popularity and were more democratic and

designed to cater for all classes in the colony. Parents could pay extra for French or drawing, singing, Latin, Euclidean geometry, if they desired. In denominational and national schools, separate schools for girls were limited but popular. Historian Marjorie Theobald found that they had 'become female academies in all but name'.<sup>60</sup> She cited Tabitha Pike, a headmistress of the St James' Girls' School, one of the first denominational schools to open in Melbourne in 1839. Pike ran a *de facto* ladies' academy for nearly twenty years, advertising music, painting and the modern languages in her regular press advertisements.<sup>61</sup>

Off the goldfields, significant educational developments in Melbourne were progressing. In 1854 the National Model and Training School opened in Spring Street, providing a teacher-training establishment as well as a model school for other schools to follow. Girls and boys from the age of thirteen attended. A married couple, Patrick and Ellen Davitt, were in charge. Patrick mainly taught the academic subjects while Ellen cared for the trainee teachers and taught needlework. Within a few months 700 boys and girls attended.<sup>62</sup>

La Trobe supported universal education.<sup>63</sup> He believed that founding both a public library and a university 'would cultivate science and morality in the colony'.<sup>64</sup> When he was Inspector of Schools, Hugh Culling Eardley Childers gave a comprehensive report on the state of education in Victoria in 1851.<sup>65</sup> La Trobe, together with Childers and Judge Redmond Barry, worked towards the establishment of the University of Melbourne and the Melbourne Public Library, the foundation stones of both being laid on the same day, 3 July 1854, by Lieutenant-Governor Sir Charles Hotham.<sup>66</sup>





**Eliza Winter, maker (aged 5½)**  
**Needlework sampler, Melbourne, 1847**  
 Museums Victoria, HT 38788

The university's foundation led to the government funding the first secondary schools for boys. Land was set aside for Scotch College, Melbourne Church of England Grammar School, Wesley College and others. No sister corporate church schools for girls were established then. However, Catholic women religious pioneered girls' secondary education in Victoria with Mother Ursula Frayne establishing the Academy of Mary Immaculate in 1857. It continues today in Nicholson Street, Carlton.<sup>67</sup>

With 'Ladies' included in their names, such as Methodist Ladies College (MLC) and Presbyterian Ladies College (PLC), these schools joined with the private ladies' colleges that had led the way preparing girls for tertiary

studies in the 1870s. Women were pioneering entrepreneurial educators in Victoria while still the Port Phillip District. Women and married couples established large successful girls' schools. In the late nineteenth century, they adjusted their curriculum to include university entrance subjects. Girls could not enrol as university students until 1880,<sup>68</sup> twenty-five years after the men. When Bella Guerin graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in 1883, she was the first woman to graduate from a university in Australia. She had passed her matriculation but did not attend a school at all, as her mother home-educated her.<sup>69</sup>

By 1860, Victoria's population was 540,000 with a greater ratio of women. 1861 was the last year of the wasteful and expensive dual system of government-funded denominational and national schools. However, many more children were in elementary schools. Denominational schools numbered 484 with 37,550 pupils, and there were 187 national schools teaching 14,000 pupils. Approximately a further 5,000 were studying in private schools. This was a total of around 56,000 children of school age, but according to Rankin, that was only fifty per cent of eligible children.<sup>70</sup>

This article examines the education of girls and boys in Port Phillip from La Trobe's era. Needlework is but one thread woven into the story of female education. In 1872 Victoria pioneered 'free compulsory and secular' schooling, and boys and girls in the state system were taught in the same classroom. Church schools continued without government funding for decades to come.

## Endnotes

- 1 A son, John Charles, was born later but sadly drowned as a child in the Yarra River.
- 2 P.L Brown and Jean Martin, 'Newcomb, Caroline Elizabeth (1812-1874)' *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (accessed online 24 September 2023).
- 3 Leslie J. Blake (Ed.), *Vision and Realisation: a centenary history of state education in Victoria*, Vol.1, Melbourne: Education Department of Victoria, 1973, pp.5-6.
- 4 Liz Rushen, 'Nichola Cooke: Port Phillip District's first headmistress' *Provenance: the journal of Public Record Office Victoria*, issue 8, 2009, p.90.
- 5 Donald Hamilton Rankin, *The History of the Development of Education in Victoria, 1836-1936: the first century of educational effort*, Melbourne: Arrow Printery, 1939, p.25.
- 6 Newcomb joined with Alexander Thomson's family at *Kardinia* on the Barwon in Geelong where she taught his only daughter, Jane. A medical practitioner and leading pastoralist who despite his uneven financial fortunes, became a Geelong institution and advocated for separation from New South Wales. Adventuring in another milieu, Newcomb partnered with farmer Anne Drysdale as successful pioneering women farmers. Like Thomson they were notably supportive of the local community and the suburbs of Newcomb and Drysdale honour their significance in community ventures and the early development of Port Phillip.
- 7 Rushen, p.90.
- 8 Jan Kociumbas, *The Oxford History of Australia*, Vol.2: *Possessions, 1770-1860*, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1992, pp. 234-235.
- 9 See also *Plan of Town of Melbourne 1837*: ancillary map Key to Early Melbourne 1838, published by H.E. Badman, printed by Sands & McDougall, c.1892-1900, Maps Collection, State Library Victoria (also held by the Royal Historical Society of Victoria).

- 10 The Church of England and the Catholic Church were each allocated two church and school sites. The Church of England's were the St James' Reserve on William Street between Collins and Bourke Streets, and St Paul's on the corner of Swanston Street and Flinders Lane. The Catholic Church had one near the corner of Bourke and Spencer Streets and the other near the present-day St Francis Church on the corner of Lonsdale and Elizabeth Streets. For Presbyterians the site was west of the present Scots' Church in Collins Street near Russell Street, while the Wesleyans' was just west of the current Wesley Church in Lonsdale Street between Russell and Exhibition Streets, and the Independents or Congregational on the east side of the current St Michael's Uniting Church at the corner of Collins and Russell Streets. They developed over the next decades.
- 11 The public elementary schools were termed Denominational Schools from 1848, and the government continued to share the administration and funding with the churches.
- 12 Carole Hooper, 'The tale of two schools: the Geelong Grammar School and the Geelong National Grammar School', Australian and New Zealand History of Education Society Conference paper, Adelaide, 1992; Marjorie R. Theobald, 'The Administration of Gender: the case of Victoria's 'Lady Teachers', 1850-1900', in Theobald *Knowing Women: origins of women's education in nineteenth century Australia*, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1996, p.134.
- 13 Captain Lonsdale's 1836 report to Governor Bourke, reprinted *Education Gazette and Teachers Aid*, vol.12, 1912, p.170.
- 14 Rankin, pp.32-33.
- 15 'Education. Advertising', *Port Phillip Gazette*, 27 April 1839, p.1.
- 16 Noeline Kyle, *Her Natural Destiny: the education of women in New South Wales*, Kensington, NSW: New South Wales University Press, 1986, p.7.
- 17 Ibid, p.8.
- 18 Richard Broome, *Aboriginal Victorians: a history since 1800*, 2nd edition, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2024, p.36.
- 19 Patricia Grimshaw, Marilyn Lake, Ann McGrath, Marian Quartly, *Creating a Nation*, Melbourne: McPhee Gribble, 1994, pp.15, 20-21..
- 20 *Historical Records of Victoria*, Vol 3: *The Early Development of Melbourne*, edited by Michael Cannon, Melbourne: Victorian Government Printing Office, 1984 p.449, citing Census of Victoria, 31st December 1839.
- 21 Glenelg's despatch quoted in John Barnes, *La Trobe: Traveller, Writer, Governor*, Canberra: Halstead Press, in association with State Library Victoria and La Trobe University, 2017, p.232.
- 22 Roslyn Otzen, 'First People's and Victorian Baptists: Collins Street Baptist Church, the Protectorate and the Merri Creek Indigenous School', in *Our Yesterdays* (Victorian Baptist Historical Society), forthcoming 2024.
- 23 Blake, p.10.
- 24 La Trobe to Colonial Secretary, No.48-1148, 18 November 1848, Legislative Council New South Wales, Select Committee on Aborigines, *Votes and Proceedings*, 1848, vol.2, p.423; reprinted *Argus*, 6 November 1849. p.4. (The four stations of the Aboriginal Protectorate covered the Westernport district, including Melbourne; the Goulburn and Loddon districts, and Mount Rouse district including Geelong.)
- 25 Rankin, p.41.
- 26 Georgiana McCrae, *Georgiana's Journal, Melbourne 1841-1865*, edited by Hugh McCrae, Canberra: Halstead Press, 2013 (first published Melbourne: Angus and Robertson, 1934), various pages throughout her diary.
- 27 Marjorie R. Theobald, 'The Accomplished Woman and the Propriety of Intellect: a new look at women's education in Britain and Australia, 1800-1850', *History of Education*, vol.17, 1988, pp.25-26.
- 28 Ibid, p.22.
- 29 *Portland Guardian and Normanby General Advertiser*, 29 October 1842, p.1.
- 30 Anne Marsden, 'Elizabeth McArthur, early Melbourne school proprietor,' *The La Trobe Journal*, No.106, September 2021, p.63.
- 31 *Australasian*, 7 December 1878, p.8.
- 32 Margaret Bowman, *Cultured Colonists: George Alexander Gilbert and his family, settlers in Port Phillip*, Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, Melbourne Athenaeum & State Library of Victoria, 2014, pp.12, 21.
- 33 Judith Rowbotham, *Good Girls Make Good Wives: guidance for girls in Victorian fiction*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1989.
- 34 Charlotte Barton, *A Mother's Offering to her Children*, by a lady long resident in New South Wales, Sydney, 1841.
- 35 Hannah Villiers Boyd, *Letters on Education: addressed to a friend in the bush of Australia*, Sydney: W. and F. Ford, 1848.
- 36 Children's Literature and Education in the 19th Century Ireland and Australia, Digital Exhibitions at Special Collections and Archives, Queens University Belfast, <https://omeka.qub.ac.uk/exhibits/show/irelandaustralia/summary> (accessed 4 November 2023).
- 37 Author calculated this total from numbers provided by Desmond Robert Gibbs, cited in note 37, p.78. Common Schools consisted of the 'denominational' and 'national' schools that operated from 1862 to 1872. The government's new Common Schools Board of Education took over the administrative duties previously conducted by the Denominational and National Boards, and partially funded the schools. Most of the Common Schools transitioned to State Schools after the 1872 *Education Act*. 'Church' schools were not government funded from then onwards.
- 38 Desmond Robert Gibbs, 'Victorian School Books: a study of the changing social content and use of school books in Victoria, 1848-1948, with particular reference to school readers', Thesis (PhD), University of Melbourne, 1987.
- 39 'Class Timetable', *Second Report the Commissioners of National Education for the Colony of Victoria, for the year 1853*, Melbourne: Government Printer, 1854, pp.38-39.
- 40 Lorinda Cramer, *Needlework and Women's Identity in Colonial Australia*, London: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2020, pp.25-26, 172-173.
- 41 Catherine Gay, 'The La Trobe's Cottage Needlework Samplers', *La Trobeana*, vol.22, no.3, November 2023, p.17.
- 42 *Simple Directions in Needlework and Cutting Out Intended for the Use of National Female Schools of Ireland*, Dublin: Commissioners of National Education in Ireland, 1856.
- 43 Norman Curry, 'The Work of the Denominational and National Boards of Education, 1850-1862', Thesis (MEd), University of Melbourne, 1965, p.210.



**Thomas Webster, 1800–1886, artist**  
**A Dame's School, 1845**

Oil on mahogany  
 Tate Gallery, London, N00427

Home-based dame schools spread from Great Britain to its colonies.

- 44 Margaret Bowman, 'Educating Agnes: Agnes La Trobe and two of her teachers', *La Trobeana*, vol.15, no.1, March 2016, p.15, citing Charles Joseph La Trobe to Julia Latrobe [sic], 6 June 1842, Charles Joseph La Trobe Miscellaneous Papers, MS000317, Royal Historical Society of Victoria.
- 45 Ibid., citing Charles Joseph La Trobe to Agnes La Trobe, 3 January 1847, La Trobe Neuchâtel Archive, Australian Manuscripts Collection, State Library Victoria, MS 13354, folder 27.
- 46 Rankin, p.42.
- 47 Alexander Mollison, 'Handwritten replies regarding education and emigration, 1842 & 1844. Alexander Fullerton Mollison Papers, MS 002505/ M-002508, Royal Historical Society of Victoria.
- 48 Thomas Learmonth, 'Boninyong School, To the Editor', *Geelong Advertiser*, 24 May 1848, p.1.
- 49 Ibid.
- 50 'Melbourne Diocesan Society Anniversary Meeting', *Argus*, 14 September 1849, p.4.
- 51 Rusden, Evidence to the Select Committee to Enquire into and Report upon the Working of the Present Systems for the Instruction of Youth in this Colony, 1852, cited Blake, p.25; Anne Blainey and Mary Lazarus, 'George William Rusden (1819–1903)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (accessed online 4 November 2023).
- 52 Rankin, p.60.
- 53 Barnes, p.279.
- 54 Rankin, pp.79–82.
- 55 <https://www.vic.gov.au/150-years-ballarat-primary-school> (accessed 29 December 2023).
- 56 [https://www.europeapedia.org/Anna\\_Harrington](https://www.europeapedia.org/Anna_Harrington) (accessed 29 December 2023).
- 57 Blake, p.37.
- 58 Curry, Appendix F, p.262.
- 59 'Educational Progress', *Observer*, Kyneton, 18 May 1858, p.2.
- 60 Theobald (1996), p.144.
- 61 Ibid.
- 62 Cheryl Griffin, 'The three "Rs": school's in at the Old Model School, Spring St', *CBD News*, <https://www.cbdnews.com.au/the-three-rs-schools-in-at-the-old-model-school-spring-st> (accessed 20 November 2023).
- 63 Dianne Reilly Drury, *La Trobe: The Making of a Governor*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2006, p.178.
- 64 Geoffrey Blainey, *A Centenary History of the University of Melbourne*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1957, p.3.
- 65 Blake, p.27, citing *First Half-yearly Report of the Inspector of Schools under the Denominational Board, 19 July 1851* (see also *First Report of the Commissioners of National Education... for the year 1852*).
- 66 Blainey, pp.1–4; *Argus*, 4 July 1854, p.5. (The University opened in 1855 and the Library in 1856.)
- 67 Deborah Towns, 'Catholic Schools', *The Encyclopedia of Women and Leadership in the Twentieth Century*, <https://www.womenaustralia.info/leaders/about.html> (accessed 20 December 2023).
- 68 Blainey, p.89.
- 69 Farley Kelly, 'Guerin, Julia Margaret (Bella) (1858–1923)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (accessed online 20 December 2023).
- 70 Rankin, p.86.

# Georgina Bell's Journal: mercantile life in Melbourne 1845 to 1860

By Lorraine Finlay

Lorraine Finlay, a member of the La Trobe Society, is the former Volunteer Property Manager of La Trobe's Cottage and a graduate of Monash University in Visual Arts and History, with an MA in Australian Studies. The history of early Port Phillip and the era of Charles La Trobe's governorship and his legacy continue to be of special interest.

*Melbourne seemed to offer better chances of getting on than remaining in Launceston.*

Georgina Bell, her husband Joseph William Bell (often referred to as J.W. Bell), their children, stepson William and stepdaughter Ann, and son-in-law Walter Powell, arrived in Melbourne on 17 November 1845 on the brig *Scout* from Launceston.<sup>1</sup> Georgina's journal recorded her first impressions of the burgeoning township, the construction and establishment of their business enterprise and snippets of domestic family life.<sup>2</sup> Aspects of her personality emerge in her journal as being astute, possessing good business acumen and concern for those less fortunate.

Georgina (née Ford) was born 29 November 1818 in Gillingham, Kent. Her mother was Elizabeth Ann Bedford (1795–1844) and her father George Ford, a professional artist and illustrator who had been commissioned by *Encyclopaedia Britannica* to produce drawings of insects, birds and flowers. She wrote that he died of galloping consumption (tuberculosis) – when she would have been only two or three years old – and that she knew very little about him except that his father was a tea merchant and the family were Quakers and disapproved of his son's career choice of being an artist. Her mother married again to a Matthew Lassetter, a schoolmaster, in Brighton, Sussex in 1825. Georgina migrated with her mother and stepfather and children from the second marriage to Sydney in 1832. They sailed on the barque *Governor Halkett*. The ship left London on 12 April 1832 and arrived in Sydney on 13 September 1832.<sup>3</sup> Once settled in Sydney the family became extraordinarily enterprising. Elizabeth Lassetter, Georgina's mother, advertised in 1833 that she had opened a warehouse in William's Place, George Street selling baby linen, and Matthew Lassetter opened a pastry cook's shop in King Street in 1834.<sup>4</sup>



Unknown artist  
Elizabeth Ann Lassetter (Ford,  
née Bedford), c.1828–1830  
Oil on canvas  
Museum of New Zealand  
Te Papa Tongarewa, 1973–0024–1  
Gift of the Gardner Estate.

However, the family migrated to Launceston in 1837 when Matthew Lassetter was appointed as a teacher at the Launceston Infant School on a salary of £100 a year with house, rent, coal and candles provided for free. Georgina was also appointed a teacher in the infant school. Matthew Lassetter not only worked as a teacher but opened a pastry and confectioner business on the corner of Brisbane and Charles Streets.<sup>5</sup> Both Georgina and her stepfather resigned from the infant school in March 1839. Georgina had married Joseph William Bell in Launceston the month before on 11 February 1839. Matthew Lassetter advertised in the *Launceston Examiner* that he





Unknown photographer  
Georgina Bell (née Ford), c.1850s  
Palmerston North Branch,  
New Zealand Society of Genealogists.

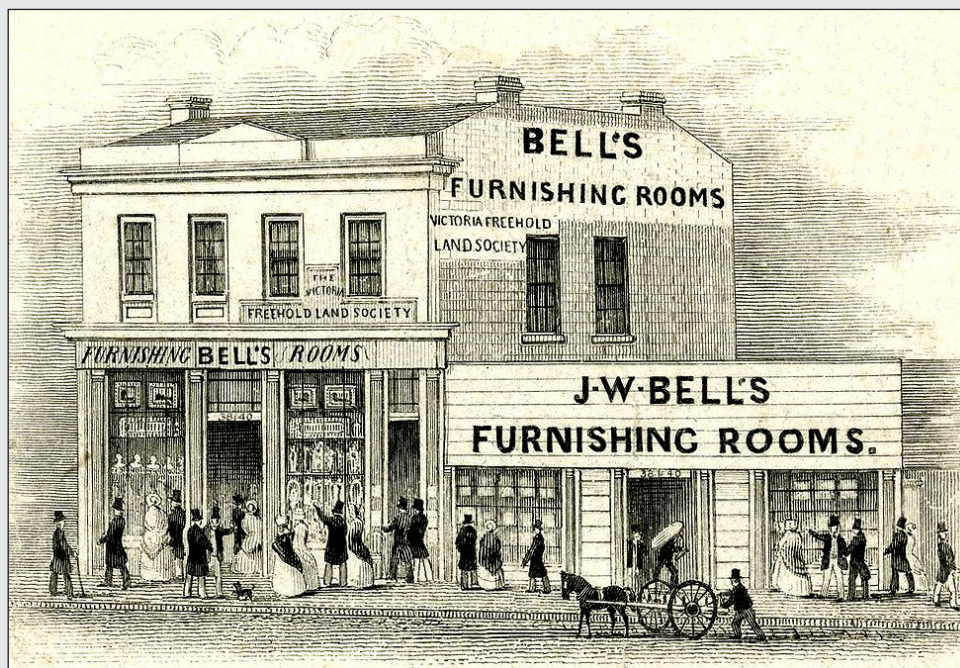
had taken out a license to continue running the former business of J.W. Bell in Charles Street on 19 July 1845.<sup>6</sup> This arrangement occurred four months before Georgina and Joseph departed Launceston for Melbourne.

Joseph William Bell was born on 4 February 1792 in Burnham-on-Crouch, Essex.<sup>7</sup> Joseph arrived in George Town, Van Diemen's Land, on 10 February 1823 aboard the cutter *Lord Liverpool* on which he was employed as a second mate. The ship was owned by William Effington Lawrence and carried general merchandise. William Lawrence sold the cutter to the colonial government and then took up a land grant. Joseph had a lucky escape on the voyage when he fell during a storm from the bowsprit (a spar running out from the bow of the ship) into the curve of a sail and avoided being washed into the ocean.<sup>8</sup> He settled in Launceston and for some years was a farmer and then a police clerk in the town.<sup>9</sup> He started his career as auctioneer in about 1834; his name began to appear in the *Launceston Advertiser* on a regular basis amongst the advertisements from 1837. He conducted his business in Charles Street; in general, the auctions involved land, property, livestock, general merchandise, and from 1844 increasingly a number of bankrupt estates. Joseph married Ann Clarke in Launceston in 1826 and they had two surviving children Ann and William. Following Ann Clarke's death in 1837 Joseph married Georgina in 1839. Joseph's daughter Ann from his first marriage married Walter Powell on 4 March 1845 in Launceston.

Georgina explained the reasons for leaving Launceston were the result of the recession in the early 1840s having wrecked fortunes, not only in Van Diemen's Land but the rest of Australia. Joseph had suffered financially from the recession, but his son-in-law Walter Powell had sufficient savings to support the entire family once they arrived in Melbourne.<sup>10</sup> They decided on Melbourne as 'It was recovering from over speculation in land, which had ruined many, but there seemed a wider sphere and better chances of getting on than by remaining in Launceston'. The voyage across Bass Strait took nine days until finally the ship anchored in Hobsons Bay. Georgina wrote that old Lehardy [*sic*] – this would have been Wilbraham Frederick Evelyn Liardet – had a cottage hotel on the beach with a small pier and that he took Joseph and Walter up the river to find temporary accommodation in Melbourne.<sup>11</sup> Georgina and the rest of the family remained on the *Scout* for two days. Georgina recorded the following account and first impressions of their arrival in the township:

We went but slowly up the bay to the entrance of the Yarra Yarra, we passed only a boat or two and a few red and white and black and white buoys, a sandbank or two on which (for the first time in my life) I saw pelicans, one of them depositing a good sized fish in its pouch, this greatly amused the children. The mouth of the salt water river was passed and we went up the narrow river Yarra Yarra, the banks looking green and pretty with tall rush like grass, and small tea tree brushwood. We passed the dirty ill-smelling boiling down establishments, all looking broken down and ne'er do well, for prices were low of sheep, wool, tallow and skins, and as I have said Melbourne was only then emerging from a panic.

Our boat at last came to the landing place, though it was only from the boat to a muddy river side, not even a plank of wood to step upon. Our boat was tied to a large old stump of a tree, while the man helped to land the contents. There was a small broken down wharf about 50 feet [15 metres] long a little higher up, but it was for the small vessels who could only get up the muddy little Yarra at high tide. So we had landed – this spot is about 200 yards [180 metres] from the present Custom House in Melbourne, our lodging was quite near, so we had not far to walk.<sup>12</sup>



Redaway & Sons, engraver  
J.W. Bell's Furnishing Rooms, c.1853  
Pictures Collection, State Library Victoria, H13609

The lodging house Georgina described as being almost a ruin had been very badly built, but it was tolerably clean and only cost the family £5 a week. She said it was kept by a dancing master, a coloured man called Green and his Irish wife and that Mr Green held dancing classes two afternoons a week in a large room. Her children were allowed to play and dance and shout in the room until they literally brought down the ceiling when large pieces of plaster began to fall on top of them. She mentioned that the hotel had previously been called the *British Hotel*. Early directories list the hotel as being situated in William Street on the eastern side of Market Square.<sup>13</sup> Georgina may not have known of Mr Green's past life, namely that Monsieur Green/Greene described as a creole had led an eventful life and was a rather dubious character who had at various times had been a French soldier, a convict, a dancing, music and fencing master, a teacher of French and a publican.<sup>14</sup>

Whilst lodging in Green's hotel they searched for suitable land to build a property to establish their business and a home. In the meantime the Powells had found a cottage to lease at the top of Great Bourke Street. Georgina described it as being:

just on the rise of the hill above  
where it is crossed by Russell Street  
now, but these streets were only then  
straggling houses and large pieces

of vacant ground between, crossed  
by many footpaths running in all  
directions, and when the grass died off  
these vacant spaces, beds of dust were  
left that the hot winds swept down  
upon the town in choking clouds, till  
a southerly buster with heavy S.W.  
showers laid the dust, and refreshed the  
distressed people'.<sup>15</sup>

Within a week of their arrival Joseph and Georgina found a semi-vacant piece of land with only a few open sheds being used as stables in Collins Street. They negotiated a seven-year lease with the owner, a Mr Steele from Hobart (also lodging at Green's) and entered into an agreement that Steele would construct a building for £700 and the lease would be ten per cent of the cost of the construction. James Webb, a local builder, was engaged to construct a building to contain an auction room 56 x 40 feet (17 x 12.2 metres), two offices, two stairs, kitchen and servants rooms on the ground floor and six rooms for the family residence upstairs.<sup>16</sup> It took six months to build and in the interim the family leased a small cottage a hundred metres from the construction site. Joseph set up a temporary auction room in a tent next door and began trading while awaiting the move into their newly-built enterprise. The exact location of the building was number 38 to 40 on the south side of Collins Street, close to Manchester Lane in the block between Swanston and

Elizabeth Streets.<sup>17</sup> An illustration from 1853 shows a substantial two storey mid-Victorian building emblazoned with the wording J.W. Bell's Furnishing Rooms. Georgina found a small school in Lonsdale Street for the three older children. Lonsdale Street in 1845 'had houses on only one side, the other was park like land, with only grass and trees as far as you could see'. She expressed her concerns for her family's health, in that Melbourne 'was badly drained, the houses not well adapted to the climate, poorly ventilated, the water for household purposes had to be raised from the river, into which the sewage of the city drained, and fever and diseases of the throat were very common (Diphtheria and Croup). Few families were found without the vacant chair and empty cot'.<sup>18</sup> (It was not until 1854 in London that Dr John Snow found that cholera was caused by drinking water contaminated by sewage from the Thames River.)

Joseph had applied for an auctioneer's general license,<sup>19</sup> but was increasingly specialising in trading in household merchandise, in particular colonial-built furniture. Prior to the Gold Rush he employed thirty workmen. Georgina was proud of Joseph's reputation as 'every article required for furnishing a house from garret to laundry was to be obtained at Mr Bell's' and that the business was largely patronised by settlers where they could buy everything packed and stored ready to put on their drays. As the population increased during the 1840s so had the availability of furnishings. More and more furniture was now being imported as cargo on ships from Britain. As well as dealing in colonial-made furniture Joseph also had an agent in England who was exporting large consignments of stock on a credit arrangement for his store. Bell's advertised for sale items of new furniture such as sofas, tables, chairs, chests of drawers and washstands.<sup>20</sup> He did occasionally sell or auction used furniture on a commission basis. The diarist Georgiana McCrae may not have been aware of the availability of household goods, for when she left London in 1840 she had packed and arranged for all her furniture and personal effects to be conveyed to Melbourne. Her inventory is reproduced in her journal and lists seventy items, everything from bedsteads to bedding, dining table, chairs, side tables, carpets, baths, fenders, pots and kettles – all shipped at great expense. Hugh McCrae, editor of *Georgiana McCrae's Journal*, expressed surprise that Georgiana shipped so much furniture, and quoted Samuel Butler's *Hand Book for Australian Emigrants* published in 1839 that '...It was quite unnecessary to carry out anything from the mother country in the shape of furniture; such articles can be procured at as cheap a rate in the colony as in England'.<sup>21</sup>



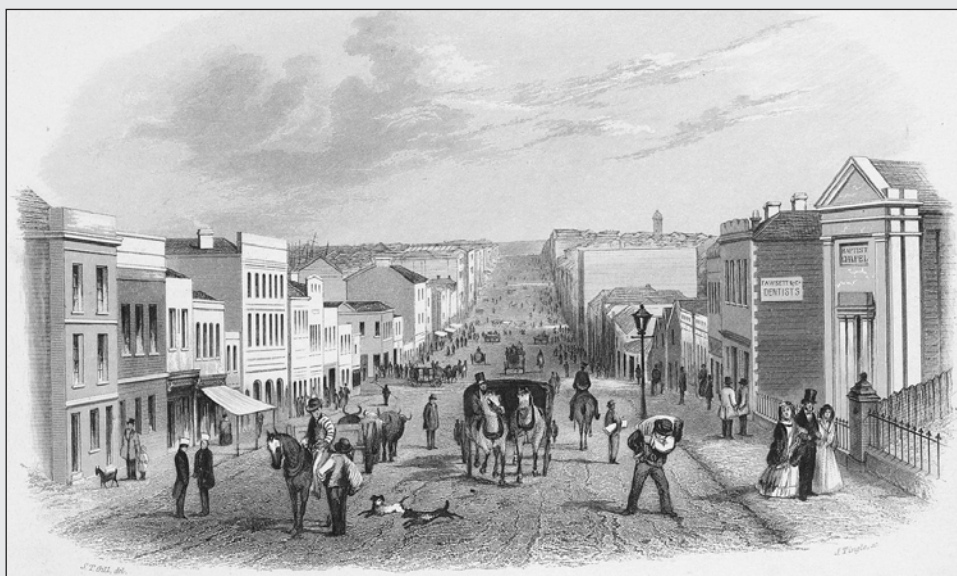
Unknown photographer  
Joseph William Bell, c.1850s  
Palmerston North Branch,  
New Zealand Society of Genealogists.

Once gold was discovered in 1851 it brought greater prosperity to the Bells, but also problems with the loss of their employees to the gold fields. Georgina recorded that:

nothing was talked of, nothing was thought of, but gold, gold, gold. It seemed to take away hunger, for it created a feeling of oppression I cannot find words to express, but an eagerness and intentness of purpose, an unhealthy excitement that is well called the gold fever. Mr Bell said again and again 'I fear my men will go, they never can resist the tales that are told, and the evidence of the truth the gold gives, when they see it'.<sup>22</sup>

Joseph's employees did resign and departed for the diggings and he was left trying to keep the business buoyant with only two older men. Georgina began to help out and their eldest son Arthur, aged only eleven, had to leave school for a time to work with his parents. Georgina became the principal salesperson for two years and commented that she felt it brought about a good change in her life. It was decided she should travel to Sydney to purchase more stock. She undertook two trips and purchased cedar chairs, sideboards, sofas and couches, which all resold at a considerable profit. More and more experienced immigrants began arriving and they eventually filled the employment vacancies at Bell's.





Samuel Thomas Gill, 1818-1880, artist  
James Tingle, 1790-1858/60, engraver  
Great Collins Street looking west from Russell Street, Melbourne, 1857

Steel engraving  
Pictures Collection, State Library Victoria, 30328102131660/45  
Bell's was located at the centre left.

The rapid influx of people into Melbourne, however, created chaos and thousands of new immigrants had little or no shelter. Georgina described the wretched conditions of many people reduced to living in tents at the end of Princes Bridge: the area that became known as the Tent City. Walter Powell and Joseph Bell, secretary for the fund-raising committee, supported the Reverend William Butters in 1851 in setting up the Wesleyan Immigrants' Home (also known as Emigrants' Home) to alleviate the problems of new arrivals who were destitute and homeless. The Immigrants' Home was situated north of the township in Drummond Street on land granted by Charles Joseph La Trobe for church purposes near to the site of the Carlton Gardens.<sup>23</sup> Money was raised by conscription from the Wesleyan community. Walter Powell made a significant contribution to the costs.<sup>24</sup> The building was completed in early 1852 and cost £3,500. It was designed to accommodate over 200 persons. The shelter was not only for Wesleyans but all religious denominations.<sup>25</sup>

Although Bell's emporium was thriving with the demand for household goods, Georgina was concerned that not only cartage, wages and rents had increased but rival auction and furnishing business had been established. (Mr Steele's building had dramatically increased in value and their rent was now £1,000 a year.) Joseph had bought land and built some houses in Melbourne but had kept the bulk of his capital for his business. She advised Joseph to show

restraint and not to purchase too many goods on credit and to sell stock at close to cost price, worried that 'supply would equal demand and most likely exceed it, and then the prices will fall'. Her advice on that occasion was taken as Joseph placed an advertisement in the *Argus* in 1852 that new stock had been received by the *Lady Peel* from London and could be viewed in an upper room, and that articles were at the lowest price and would be sold for cash.<sup>26</sup> However, in the following year, October 1853, Georgina was dismayed when Joseph informed her he had taken on credit (she often refers to an invoice) a large consignment of goods from England. She implored him not to buy in a 'falling market' and that he 'pooh poohed' her advice.

In 1852, still flush with funds, they had taken over the family residence on the top storey of the building in Collins Street as an extra display area and bought a house in Alma Road, St. Kilda, close to the corner of Brighton Road. After the family had settled in the house Georgina decided to remove her boys from Scotch College as the fees had been increased to £100 a year. Scotch College was established in 1851 as the Melbourne Academy. At that time it was a single-storey blue stone cottage and situated in Spring Street between Lonsdale and Little Lonsdale Streets. She engaged instead a brother and sister, Mr and Miss McLeod who were newly arrived from Scotland, as a tutor for the boys and a governess for the girls to instruct all of the children at home. Nine



children were eventually born to the couple: Arthur, Josephine, Jessie, Charles, George, Kezia, Alfred, Florence and Henry. Melbourne experienced an outbreak of measles in late 1853 into 1854. All of Georgina's family suffered and her eldest daughter Josephine, aged thirteen, died in May 1854 from complications as a result of the disease.

Georgina's anxieties concerning their business were prematurely and unexpectedly realised when Joseph was involved in an accident and thrown onto the road whilst driving his dogcart to work on 18 September 1854. He was driving along St Kilda Road when his vehicle was struck from behind by a large omnibus coming from Prahran.<sup>27</sup> His dogcart was most probably a small two-wheeled one-horse carriage with a second seat behind. He suffered a compound fracture of his thigh. Dr Godfrey Howitt, a witness at the Supreme Court case on 3 May 1855, attested that Joseph would be a cripple for the rest of his life. Joseph was unable to work for some months, so they had to rely upon an employee to maintain the business. Georgina described Joseph as being despondent and was increasingly distressed that everything became neglected and mismanaged. (Joseph was eventually able to walk with the aid of crutches.) Their problems were compounded by extra ships arriving with merchandise and competition from other merchants. They faced possible bankruptcy until Georgina approached Walter Powell for help. Despite having £70,000 in property and stock and £20,000 in liabilities, their creditors demanded instant payment. Walter came to their rescue and negotiated with their creditors. Georgina was extremely unhappy with the outcome and she upbraided Walter for making an iniquitous decision to accede to their creditors' demands and leave them with few options to be able to keep on trading. A number of advertisements appeared in *The Age* some months after the accident that Bell's of Collins Street were selling off all their stock. On the same page Beauchamp's of Bourke Street were also selling stock formerly from Bell's.<sup>28</sup> To be able to retain the furniture store Joseph then formed a partnership with his brother-in-law Horatio Beauchamp. By January 1856 Bell's and Beauchamp had merged and were trading from Joseph's original premises at 38-40 Collins Street.<sup>29</sup>

During their financial problems the Bells were forced to sell their home in St Kilda and move into a cottage they owned in Nicholson Street, Collingwood (today Fitzroy).<sup>30</sup> To help with the family finances Georgina secured a position as a teacher in the infant school department of the Model School on a salary of £200 a year. The National Model and Training

School (picture p.12) was established by the Victorian National Board of Education in 1852. The school was government funded. It opened in 1854 and was situated in the block between Victoria Street and Lonsdale Street. Described as a model for other schools it provided separate primary education for girls and boys and an infant school and teacher training. She worked at the school for three years, and with the help of a loan from family members was able to pay off some of their debts.

Joseph and Horatio's partnership was not a success. Georgina's observation is that they were not compatible. The Beauchamp brothers placed an advertisement in the *Argus* on 8 December 1859 that J.W. Bell was relinquishing the furniture trade and they were to sell, by instruction, all of his stock of furniture at his late premises in Collins Street over three days on 7, 8 and 9 December.<sup>31</sup> Georgina and Joseph had decided to return to Tasmania; in January of 1860 Georgina and Joseph and son Charles were listed as passengers arriving in Launceston on the 9th of the month.<sup>32</sup> By early 1860 Beauchamp auctioneers were the sole traders and had taken over J.W. Bell's property and were selling new and second-hand furniture.<sup>33</sup>

### Postscript

Georgina wrote that after returning to Tasmania Joseph attempted to commercially farm crops of vegetables on a small scale. Their leased property *Hazeldean* was at O'Brien's Bridge, Glenorchy near Hobart.<sup>34</sup> However, she said it was a failure. By 1868 they had retired and settled in Hobart. Joseph Bell died 1 July 1870 in Newtown. Nine months later Georgina announced that she was leaving the colony of Tasmania and all of her furniture and household effects at her house *Floresville*, Newtown, were to be auctioned on 3 March 1871.<sup>35</sup> The last few pages of her journal written in the 1870s were a record of her efforts to secure employment for her three eldest sons, Arthur, Charles and George, and the marriages of her sons and daughters. Georgina moved to Rockhampton and also Maryborough, Queensland, and lived in turn with her eldest son Arthur and his family and her daughter Kezia and son-in-law Robert Gardner. Arthur Bell and Robert Gardner were in partnership in ironmongery stores in both towns. Georgina witnessed the drowning of her daughter Florence, aged twenty-one, and grandson Arthur William Bell, aged seven, in a boating accident at Greenlake, near Rockhampton on 27 March 1875.<sup>36</sup>

Her daughter Jessie (1843-1885) married George Lloyd in 1866 and went to live at a property at Coonamble, New South Wales.

Jessie began writing articles under the pen name 'Silverleaf' in 1878. She became a successful published writer of outback life in two books, short stories, essays and poems.<sup>37</sup> There was also literary success in Georgina's extended family through the marriage of her two half-sisters to the Beauchamp brothers. Georgina was distantly related to the New Zealand author Katherine Mansfield (née Kathleen Mansfield Beauchamp 1888–1923<sup>38</sup>). She was directly related to the

English author Elizabeth von Arnim (née Mary Annette Beauchamp, 1866–1941<sup>39</sup>), whose best-known works are *Elizabeth and her German Garden* and *Enchanted April*.<sup>40</sup> Georgina followed her son Arthur and his wife and the Gardners to New Zealand by the late 1870s. She died in April 1909 at the home of her daughter Kezia and Robert Gardner in Palmerston North, New Zealand.<sup>41</sup>

---

## Endnotes

- 1 *Colonial Times*, Shipping Intelligence, 14 November 1845, p.2, The *Scout* sailed from the port of Launceston on 8 November. It was a square two-masted sailing ship mainly used for coastal voyages.
  - 2 Family papers/ Georgina Bell, MS 11734, Australian Manuscripts Collection, State Library Victoria. This comprises a typed transcript of Georgina's original journal on foolscap pages by her granddaughter, Florence Lloyd (née Gardner), born Rockhampton 1868, died New Zealand in 1935. Florence was the daughter of Kezia Bell. Florence did not record a date on the typed document. There is no record of the location of the original journal. The journal was largely compiled from diary entries over the period 1845 to 1860. There are additional pages following on from 1860 by Georgina completed about 1875. There is a page with a family tree and a number of pages written by Georgina on the history of her maternal ancestors (no date).
  - 3 *Sydney Herald*, Shipping Intelligence, 13 September 1832, p.2. The ship's captain was Fotheringham and it carried passengers and merchandise. Georgina is listed as Miss Georgiana Lassiter.
  - 4 *Sydney Herald*, 30 May 1833, p.1. See also *The Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser*, 11 January 1834, p.2.
  - 5 *Cornwall Chronicle*, 29 April 1837, p.1. Lassetter replied in a letter to the paper that his business interest did not interfere with his role as a teacher at the infant school. See appointment of Matthew Lassetter and Georgina in Betty Jones, 'Laying the Foundations, Launceston Infant School 1836', *Tasmanian Ancestry*, vol.38, no.3, December 2017, p.144.
  - 6 *Launceston Examiner*, 19 July 1845, p.2. (In this article 'license' is spelt as in the nineteenth-century sources.)
  - 7 Joseph W. Bell's place of birth recorded on his memorial stone in St John's Cemetery, Newtown, Hobart. Father, William Bell; Mother, Hannah Wood married in Burnham, Essex in 1782. See Ancestry.com.
  - 8 *Launceston Examiner*, 18 April 1885, p.3, Obituary, William Thomas Bell (son of Joseph William Bell), together with the life and times of William Effington Lawrence – includes an account of the voyage to Van Diemen's Land.
  - 9 *Launceston Advertiser*, 3 August 1829, p.2. (In this article 'license' is spelt as in the nineteenth-century sources.)
  - 10 Renate Howe, 'Powell, Walter (1822–1868)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (accessed online 7 October 2023). His family migrated to Van Diemen's Land in 1823. He began working as a junior clerk, aged fifteen, for J.W. Bell's auction house in Launceston in 1834. After he arrived with the Bells in Melbourne he set up a successful ironmongery business in Collins Street. With acquired wealth following the Gold Rush he began his philanthropic work which included generous donations to the Wesleyan Church, Wesleyan Immigrants' Home, Melbourne Benevolent Asylum and the establishment of Wesley College.
  - 11 Georgina Bell journal, p.12. See 'Liardet, Wilbraham Frederick Evelyn (1799–1878)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (accessed online 7 October 2023). He arrived in Melbourne 1839, established a mail run from Sandridge (later Port Melbourne) and built a jetty and hotel close to the beach. He produced sketches of the early settlement which later became the basis of his watercolours.
  - 12 Georgina Bell journal, p.13.
  - 13 *The Port Phillip Separation Merchants' and Settlers' Almanac, Diary and Melbourne Directory for 1845*, p.67. See also *Kerr's Almanac and Port Phillip Directory 1841*, p.280. The British Hotel had been owned by W. Harper and then sold to Augustus Greeves and by 1844 to Emanuel Green. See also *Publican Index of 19th Century Victoria* (online): Green issued with a license in May 1844.
  - 14 Graeme Skinner, University of Sydney, 'A Biographical Register of Australian Colonial Musical Personnel – A (A-Allan)', *Australharmony* (an online resource toward the early history of music in colonial Australia), <https://sydney.edu.au/paradisec/australharmony/register-G-2.php>; (accessed 19 August 2023).
- Emanuel Greene [sic] was born in Bordeaux in c.1794. He claimed to have been in the 3rd Regiment of Chasseurs and at the Battle of Waterloo. Moved to London in 1820s and was convicted of fraud and transported to Van Diemen's Land for seven years in 1828. Married Charlotte Bolger in Hobart in 1831 and after gaining a ticket of leave in 1832 began teaching dancing and fencing. In 1835 he moved to Launceston and taught dancing. In July 1838 he moved the family to Sydney (and, coincidentally, in Launceston his household effects were auctioned by J.W. Bell). In Sydney he taught fencing and dancing; declared insolvent and imprisoned for debt. He then moved to Melbourne by 1843 and took over the British Hotel. Four years later the family moved to Geelong and he leased the Corio Hotel. By the 1850s they moved back to live in Brighton, Melbourne. He died in 1857.
- 15 Georgina Bell journal, pp.13–14.
  - 16 Charles Bridges-Webb, 'Webb, James (1808–1870)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (accessed online 7 October 2023). James Webb arrived Van Diemen's Land in 1830 and migrated to Melbourne in 1839 where he worked as a builder. He went into partnership with his brother, Charles Webb, as architects and surveyors in 1849. Their first commission was St Paul's Church, corner of Flinders and Swanston Streets, built between 1850 and 1852, the site of today's St Paul's Cathedral. Together they built warehouses, private homes, a synagogue, churches and schools.
  - 17 *Sands and Kenny Melbourne Directory 1858*, p.24. (Note the numbering system for properties in Collins Street changed in 1887.) *Melbourne Courier*, 3 December 1845, p.2, 'New Auctioneer', includes a description of the temporary weatherboard building on the corner of Collins and Swanston Streets, whilst extensive premises were being erected adjoining the Commercial Hotel.
  - 18 Georgina Bell journal, p.15.
-

- 19 *Victorian Government Gazette*, 17 January 1849, Issue 3, p.27.
- 20 *Argus*, 21 July 1849, p.3. See *Melbourne Commercial, Squatters' and Official Directory for 1854*, pp. 247–248, reference to his agent in London.
- 21 Georgiana McCrae, *Georgiana's Journal, Melbourne 1841-1865*, edited by Hugh McCrae, Canberra: Halstead Press, 2013, pp.35–36.
- 22 Georgina Bell journal, p.17.
- 23 Benjamin Gregory, (ed.) *The Thorough Business Man: memoirs of Walter Powell, merchant, Melbourne and London*, London: Strahan & Co., 1871, p.136; *Melbourne and its Suburbs*, [map] compiled by James Kearney, Melbourne: Victoria Surveyor-General, 1855.
- 24 Gregory, pp.136–137.
- 25 *Argus*, 3 November 1852, p.2.
- 26 *Ibid.*, 20 March 1852, p.3.
- 27 *Argus*, Supreme Court, 3 May 1855, p.6. See also 7 May 1855, p.6. Bell v. Ford and Scuffam. Joseph was awarded £100 in damages.
- 28 *Age*, 19 May 1855, p.1.
- 29 *Ibid.*, 1 January 1856, p. 1. Horatio Beauchamp married Georgina's half-sister Annie Mary Lassetter in 1853. Horatio had arrived in Melbourne in 1848. Once gold was discovered he set off for the diggings. By 1854 he had established a warehouse in Melbourne selling furniture. See *Sands and Kenny Melbourne Directory 1858*, p. 63, for the listing of Bell & Beauchamp, 38–40 Collins Street.
- 30 *Sands and Kenny Melbourne Directory 1857*, pp.151–152. Joseph William Bell, 16 Nicholson Street, Collingwood close to East Melbourne in the Fitzroy Ward.
- 31 *Argus*, 8 December 1859, p.2.
- 32 *Launceston Examiner*, 10 January 1860, p.2. The Bells' other children were probably among the twenty people listed as steerage. Note name change: Van Diemen's Land became Tasmania in 1856.
- 33 *Age*, 5 April 1860, p.7. See also article *Argus*, 13 January 1932, p.10. J W Bell's former business sold (by Beauchamps) to the Company G. and W.H. Rocke in 1861.
- 34 *Hobart Town Gazette*, No.4271, 16 May 1862, p.727, Valuation roll for the District of Hobart, Subdivision 2: J.W. Bell, Cottage, stabling, land, etc., Bowden Street, O'Brien's Bridge, Glenorchy.
- 35 *Mercury*, 3 March 1871, p.4.
- 36 *Argus*, 16 April 1875, p.7.
- 37 Sally O'Neill, 'Lloyd, Jessie Georgina (1843–1885)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (accessed online 7 October 2023).
- 38 Gillian Boddy, 'Mansfield, Katherine', *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, Te Ara – the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, <https://teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/3m42/mansfield-katherine> (accessed 6 November 2023).
- 39 Elizabeth von Arnim, <https://elizabethvonarnimsociety.org/about-elizabeth-von-arnim/biography/> (accessed 6 November 2023).
- 40 Georgina's half-sister, Annie Lassetter, married Horatio Beauchamp; his brother Arthur Beauchamp was the grandfather of Katherine Mansfield. Georgina's other half-sister, Elizabeth Lassetter, married Horatio's other brother Henry Heron Beauchamp; their daughter Mary Annette Beauchamp, who published as Elizabeth von Arnim, was Georgina's niece.
- 41 *Manawater Standard*, 21 April 1909, p.1.

# *The American Ancestors of the La Trobe Family revisited*

By Tim Gatehouse

**Tim Gatehouse is a retired solicitor with interests in the history of pre-goldrush Victoria, architecture, gardening and libraries. His articles on these subjects have appeared in various journals. He has also published the titles *On Board with the Bishop: Charles Perry's Voyage to Port Phillip on the 'Stag'* (2017), *The Two Wings of Bishops court* (2017), *Robert Outhwaite: His Diary and the Painting of the 'Stag'* (2023), and other booklets. His interest in Charles Joseph La Trobe stems from the American ancestors his family shares with the La Trobes.**

---

Many families have their myths and legends which after being repeated and passed down through generations are accepted in the family context as being factual. Most of these legends enhance the prestige of the family by reference to the significance of previous generations or their involvement in well-known historical events. Even in families which have been the subject of scholarly study it is not uncommon for such legends to have been accepted as true and incorporated into the historical narrative. However, in many cases where further study has revealed that the legends are largely fictitious there is nonetheless a kernel of truth on which the legend was based, which has been exaggerated and distorted in the retelling, sometimes innocently, sometimes deliberately to suit the current circumstances of the family. Before the advent of the internet the sources of information available to historians were far less extensive than afterwards, so reliance on family legends, especially those which had been enshrined in the work of successive historians, was all the greater and could not without difficulty be tested.

Much of the research on the La Trobe family was carried out before the arrival of the internet and was thus reliant on written records and family reminiscences. An unchallenged

component of the history of the La Trobe family concerned the origins of Charles Joseph La Trobe's great-grandfather Johann Heinrich Antes, known in America as Henry Antes. He was born in 1701 at Freinsheim in the Rhineland Palatinate and emigrated to Pennsylvania in 1722 with his parents, brother and sister. Henry Antes married Christina Elizabeth De Wees. One of their children, Anna Margareta, married Reverend Benjamin La Trobe. They had five children, one of whom was Christian Ignatius La Trobe who married Benigna Symms. Charles Joseph La Trobe was one of their six children.

In accordance with the accepted account of the origins of Henry Antes's family which I included in my article 'The American Ancestors of the La Trobe Family' published in *La Trobeana* in 2012, one of his antecedents had been a German baron and abbot of a monastery who had fallen in love with the abbess of a convent. In order to marry, they fled their respective religious houses and converted to Protestantism. The baron's surname was von Blume, German for flower, but after his conversion and marriage it was changed to Antes, derived from the Greek word for flower, Anthos.<sup>1</sup> One version of the legend places these events as occurring during the Thirty Years War (1618-1648) and attributes the change of name to fear of persecution which in a time of religious





Berthold Werner, photographer  
Freinsheim – 18th century town hall, and Protestant church  
Wikimedia Commons (2011)

strife may have been a reality, especially when the unusual circumstances of their marriage are considered. In the other version the baron/abbot and abbess are stated to have been Henry Antes's parents, but this had little plausibility as their marriage occurred in 1700, half a century after the end of the Thirty Years War.

As to how long the legendary origin of the Antes family had been in circulation is not known, but it was recorded in 1870 by Henry Onderdonk (1822-1895), a descendant of Benjamin Henry Latrobe [*sic*] and his second wife Mary Elizabeth Hazelhurst.<sup>2</sup> He favoured the version of the marriage of the baron/abbot and the abbess as having occurred during the Thirty Years War. This was also the version included in the article on Henry Antes in the *Dictionary of American Biography* published between 1928 and 1936.<sup>3</sup>

In his biography of Benjamin Henry Latrobe (1764-1820) published in 1955 the American architectural historian Talbot Hamlin favoured the version that the baron/abbot and abbess were Henry Antes's parents, rather than earlier generations who lived during the Thirty Years War.<sup>4</sup> He placed much reliance on information provided to him by Benjamin Henry Latrobe's great-grandson Ferdinand Claiborne Latrobe II (1889-1944) whom he met while writing his earlier book on *Greek*

*Revival Architecture in America*, published in 1944. Hamlin had become aware of Latrobe's significance to the development of architecture in America while writing this book. Ferdinand Latrobe had collected and preserved Benjamin Henry Latrobe's papers and drawings and made them available to Hamlin.<sup>5</sup> A warm friendship developed between Hamlin and Latrobe with whom he shared many interests in history and antiquities. Hamlin described Ferdinand Latrobe as 'a man of wide curiosities',<sup>6</sup> a description which could well be applied to another prominent member of the family. After Ferdinand Latrobe's death his widow Aileen Ford Latrobe continued to help Hamlin with the biography which he dedicated to her.<sup>7</sup> It is highly likely that Ferdinand Latrobe not only provided Hamlin with Latrobe's papers but also with family reminiscences including those relating to the origins of the Antes family.

Alan Gross in his biography of Charles Joseph La Trobe published in 1956 supported the theory that Henry Antes was descended from Baron von Blume, who during the Thirty Years War had hellenised his name to Antes which he stated meant a row of flowers.<sup>8</sup> By the time I wrote my article in 2012 Henry Antes's parents were identified as being Philip Frederick Antes and Anna Katharine Kinder. In the absence of evidence to the contrary I proceeded on the basis that baron/abbot and abbess must have



Unknown photographer  
The Henry Antes house in Upper Frederick, Pennsylvania, 2011  
Goschenhoppen Historians Inc.

been earlier ancestors of Henry Antes and that the events leading to the change of name had occurred during the Thirty Years War. This was also the account accepted ('if Talbot Hamlin is correct') by John Barnes in his biography of Charles Joseph La Trobe published in 2017.<sup>9</sup>

In recent times further research into the Antes family has been carried out in the United States and Germany by the Antes Family Association and the Goschenhoppen Historians Inc., a society which preserves the house built by Henry Antes in 1736 at Upper Frederick Township, Pennsylvania.<sup>10</sup> It is maintained as a museum and historical research centre. The house is recorded as a National Historic Landmark on account of its architecture, its connection with the Moravian church and for having been for a brief period the headquarters of George Washington during the Revolutionary War. Moravians have always been diligent record keepers and much information is derived from the 'lebenslaufen', short autobiographies which were customarily written by early Moravians, many of which have been preserved by descendants or lodged in the Moravian Archives in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. Anna Catharina Antes (born 1726) an elder sister of Anna Margareta Antes (who married Benjamin La Trobe) is known to have written one. Perhaps it was in records such as this that the legendary origin of the Antes family was first recorded.

The research has revealed that the origins of the Antes family are far more prosaic than the romantic legend. Early generations of the family lived in what is now the Bad Kreuznach District of the Rhineland-Palatinate Region of Germany, close to the border with Luxembourg. Due to the complexity of family relationships and the large number of individuals involved over several generations, only the direct line of descent to Henry Antes is given here. His earliest recorded ancestors were Niclas von Breidenau (1450-1520) and Katharina von Callbach who lived in the village of Meisenheim. They educated their son Johannes von Breidenau (1480-1543) to a high standard with the intention that he enter the priesthood, but instead Johannes decided to marry, his wife being Katharina von Futer (1480-1547). She too was born at Meisenheim. Katharina may have already been Protestant in which case the marriage would most likely have been the catalyst for Johannes's conversion. For disobeying his father's wishes Johannes was disinherited, Niclas instead leaving his property to Johannes's third son Antonius (1505-1552). Johannes's disinheritance by Niclas in favour of Antonius may have provoked a family feud, but Antonius evidently wished to establish a new branch of the family and did so by adopting a variation of his given name to create the new surname of Antes. With occasional variations of Anthis or Anthes, this remained the

surname of Antonius's descendants. Antonius married Engel von Callbach (1518-1609), Callbach being a village three kilometres east of Meisenheim.

The occupations of Niclas and Johannes von Breidenau and Antonius Antes are not known, but Antonius's son Hans Antes (1530-1608) was a cloth weaver who in 1560 married Engel Angelica Thein (1538-1609). One of their children, Johannes Konrad Antes (born 1580, died before 1622) was also a cloth weaver. In 1605 he married Ursula Eulenberg (born c.1575). The marriage took place at Breitenheim bei Meisenheim, an indication of how limited these families' movements were over several generations. One of Konrad and Ursula's children, Johann Leonard Antes (born 23 July 1609 at Breitenheim, died 1665 at Kreuznach forty kilometres to the west of Meisenheim) was a cooper. In 1630 he married Katharine Neumann (1611-1681). Johann and Katharine's son Johann Georg Antes (died 1710) was also a cooper. In 1660 he married Anna Engel Linbach (born 1641 at Breitenheim). Amongst their children was Philip Frederick Antes (born 1 September 1675) at Freinsheim seventy-five kilometres south-east of Meisenheim. In 1700 he married Anna Katharine Kinder, also born at Freinsheim in 1675. They were the parents of Johann Heinrich Antes – Henry Antes. Although his occupation in Germany is not known, soon after arriving in Pennsylvania in 1722 Philip Frederick Antes established a farm and built an inn, which would indicate the possession of some capital and skill as a builder, but not a clerical or aristocratic background.

As to how the romantic but false legend of the ancestry of Henry Antes arose can only be a matter of speculation. Over several generations Johannes von Breidenau's refusal to follow his father's wishes to enter the priesthood, his conversion to Protestantism and marriage to a protestant wife with the prefix 'von' to her name indicating noble descent as opposed to place of residence, may have been transformed into the tale of the elopement of the baron/abbot and abbess. It may well have suited the aspirations of the La Trobe family in Britain and America to accept this account of one of their ancestors, as it did with respect to their family's supposed relationship to Count Bonneval, which similarly has no foundation.

Henry Antes may not have brought the La Trobe family an aristocratic pedigree with a touch of romance, but he did bring them the qualities of a stalwart pioneer and a community and religious leader who was an exemplar of the colonists who half a century after his arrival in Pennsylvania created a new nation. Regardless of his antecedents, his descendants included the British, German and American branches of the La Trobe family and many members of the Roosevelt family.

---

#### Endnotes

- 1 Tim Gatehouse, 'The American Ancestors of the La Trobe Family', *La Trobeana*, Vol.11, No.2, June 2012, p.26.
- 2 Elmer Onderdonk, *Genealogy of the Onderdonk Family in America*, privately printed, New York, 1910. (Benjamin Henry Latrobe spelt his name as one word, the original spelling of the name. Ed.)
- 3 *Dictionary of American Biography*, edited by Allen Johnson under the auspices of the American Council of Learned Societies, Volume 1, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1928, p.312.
- 4 Talbot Hamlin, *Benjamin Henry Latrobe*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955, p.7.
- 5 Latrobe's papers were subsequently acquired by the Maryland Historical Society which initiated a project under the editorial direction of Edward Carter to have them published by Yale University Press.
- 6 Hamlin, p.vii.
- 7 Ibid., p.viii.
- 8 Alan Gross, *Charles Joseph La Trobe*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1956, p.3.
- 9 John Barnes, *La Trobe: Traveller, Writer, Governor*, Canberra, Halstead Press in association with State Library Victoria and La Trobe University, 2017, p.41.
- 10 Robert Wood and Arthur J. Lawton, Goschenhoppen Historians Inc, Pennsylvania, Research notes on Henry Antes.





**Charles Joseph La Trobe,  
1801-1875, artist  
The Chateau Angenstein,  
Val de Moutier, 1824**

Pencil and sepia wash on paper  
National Trust of Australia  
(Victoria), LTC 325.  
Deposited on long-term loan  
in the Pictures Collection,  
State Library Victoria



**Charles Joseph La Trobe,  
1801-1875, artist  
Government House,  
Sydney, 1851**

Pencil and sepia wash on paper  
National Trust of Australia  
(Victoria), LTC 294  
Deposited on long-term loan  
in the Pictures Collection,  
State Library Victoria

## La Trobe Artworks

As many people will know, over 400 landscapes and sketches by Charles Joseph La Trobe are located in the Pictures Collection of State Library Victoria. Two-thirds of these, donated by his grandchildren Captain Charles La Trobe and Mrs Victoria La Trobe Shea-Simons to the National Trust of Australia (Victoria) in 1960, are on long-term loan for safe keeping in the library. These are in four folios covering Switzerland-Italy, North America, Mexico and Port Phillip. The remaining three folios covering England, Tahiti and Tasmania were purchased by the library in 1992 as part of the collection known as the 'La Trobe Archive' and are fully accessible via the library's catalogue.

The pictures covering Switzerland-Italy, North America, Mexico and Port Phillip may now be accessed via the National Trust's recently-launched online collections database at

<https://collection.nationaltrust.org.au>

Click on La Trobe's Cottage, and then for convenience sort by 'accession number' and refine by collection type 'artworks'.

It is a great boon for researchers to have ready access to this valuable body of work.

**Helen Armstrong**



**Thomas Barber, 1768 -1843, artist**  
**Christian Ignatius La Trobe, c.1815**  
 Oil on canvas  
 National Trust of Australia (Victoria) LTC 153



**John Astley, 1724-1787, artist**  
**Benjamin La Trobe, c.1770**  
 Oil on canvas  
 National Trust of Australia (Victoria) LTC 147

## La Trobe Family Portraits

After extensive restoration work the portraits of Charles Joseph La Trobe's father and grandfather, Christian Ignatius (1758-1836) and Reverend Benjamin (1728-1786), are again hanging in the Dining Room of La Trobe's Cottage. Information on the artists and sitters was published in the March 2023 issue of *La Trobeana*,<sup>1</sup> when an appeal was launched for funds to undertake the necessary conservation work on the portraits.

The appeal to La Trobe Society members raised \$21,000, plus a further \$1,000 to complete the restoration of the badly damaged frame of the Christian Ignatius painting.

The work was undertaken by Noel Turner, of Artfix in Brunswick, who said that:

The transformation of the paintings and frames has been rewarding; the re-emergence of colour tones and details previously obscured by a thick layer of dirt, soot, over-paint and discoloured varnish enables the portraits to be viewed as intended.

The Society is grateful to its members and friends whose donations enabled the restoration of these significant portraits to take place.

---

### Endnote

<sup>1</sup> Helen Armstrong, 'Portraits of the Reverend Benjamin La Trobe and Christian Ignatius La Trobe'. *La Trobeana*, vol.22, no.1, March 2023, pp. 43-44.

---

# Forthcoming events

---

Invitations will be emailed to members in advance of each event.  
Bookings are essential, except for the Sunday service

## 2024

### MARCH

---

#### Sunday 17

**La Trobe's Birthday Celebration:**

**La Trobe Family Portraits –**

**Special Viewing**

**Time:** 4.30 – 6.30pm

**Venue:** La Trobe's Cottage, Dallas Brooks Drive, Melbourne

**Speaker:** John Botham, Chair, Friends of La Trobe's Cottage

**Topic:** Two important portraits of Charles Joseph's father Christian Ignatius La Trobe and grandfather Rev. Benjamin La Trobe, by renowned artists Thomas Barber and John Astley, will be on display after extensive conservation

**Admission:** \$15 per person

**Sparkling wine and cake will be served**

### APRIL

---

#### Tuesday 16

**Joint La Trobe Society/RHSV**

**AGL Shaw Lecture**

**Time:** 5.30 – 7.30 pm

**Venue:** Royal Historical Society of Victoria, Cnr William and A'Beckett Streets, Melbourne

**Speaker:** Professor Penny Edmonds, Matthew Flinders Professor, History, Flinders University, South Australia

**Topic:** Anti-Slavery and Protection in Port Phillip and New South Wales: The Curious Colonial Afterlife of the 1837 Select Committee Report on Aborigines

**Refreshments**

**Admission:** \$35 per person

## MAY

---

#### Tuesday 14 tbc

**Friends of La Trobe's Cottage**

**Annual lecture**

**Time:** 5.30 – 7.30 pm

**(Details to be advised)**

## JULY

---

#### Thursday 18

**Melbourne Rare Book Week La Trobe Society Lecture**

**Time:** 6.30 – 8.30 pm

**Venue:** Tonic House, 386 Flinders Lane, Melbourne

**Speaker:** Historian Shane Carmody

**Topic:** Noted Donors and Donations to the Melbourne Public Library Collections (tbc)

**Refreshments**

**No charge**

## AUGUST

---

**La Trobe Society**

**Annual General Meeting & Dinner**

**Time:** 6.30pm

**(Details to be advised)**

### Bookings

---

For catering purposes, bookings are essential

Email: [secretary@latrobsociety.org.au](mailto:secretary@latrobsociety.org.au)

Or phone Dianne Reilly on 0412 517 061

For the latest information on  
upcoming events, please refer  
to the Society's events page  
[www.latrobesociety.org.au/events](http://www.latrobesociety.org.au/events)

## Back Issues

---

Back issues of La Trobeana are available on the Society's website, except for the last issue.

The back issues may be accessed at [www.latrobesociety.org.au/LaTrobeana](http://www.latrobesociety.org.au/LaTrobeana)

They may be searched by keyword.

---

**The Editorial Committee welcomes contributions to La Trobeana which is published three times a year.**

**Further information about the Journal may be found on the inside front cover and at [www.latrobesociety.org.au/LaTrobeana](http://www.latrobesociety.org.au/LaTrobeana)**

**For copies of guidelines for contributors and subscriptions enquiries contact:**

The Honorary Secretary: Dr Dianne Reilly AM  
The C J La Trobe Society  
PO Box 65  
Port Melbourne Vic 3207  
Phone: 0412 517 061  
Email: [secretary@latrobesociety.org.au](mailto:secretary@latrobesociety.org.au)



BACK COVER  
La Trobe Family coat of arms

INSIDE FRONT COVER  
Charles Joseph La Trobe's coat of arms,  
taken from his bookplate



