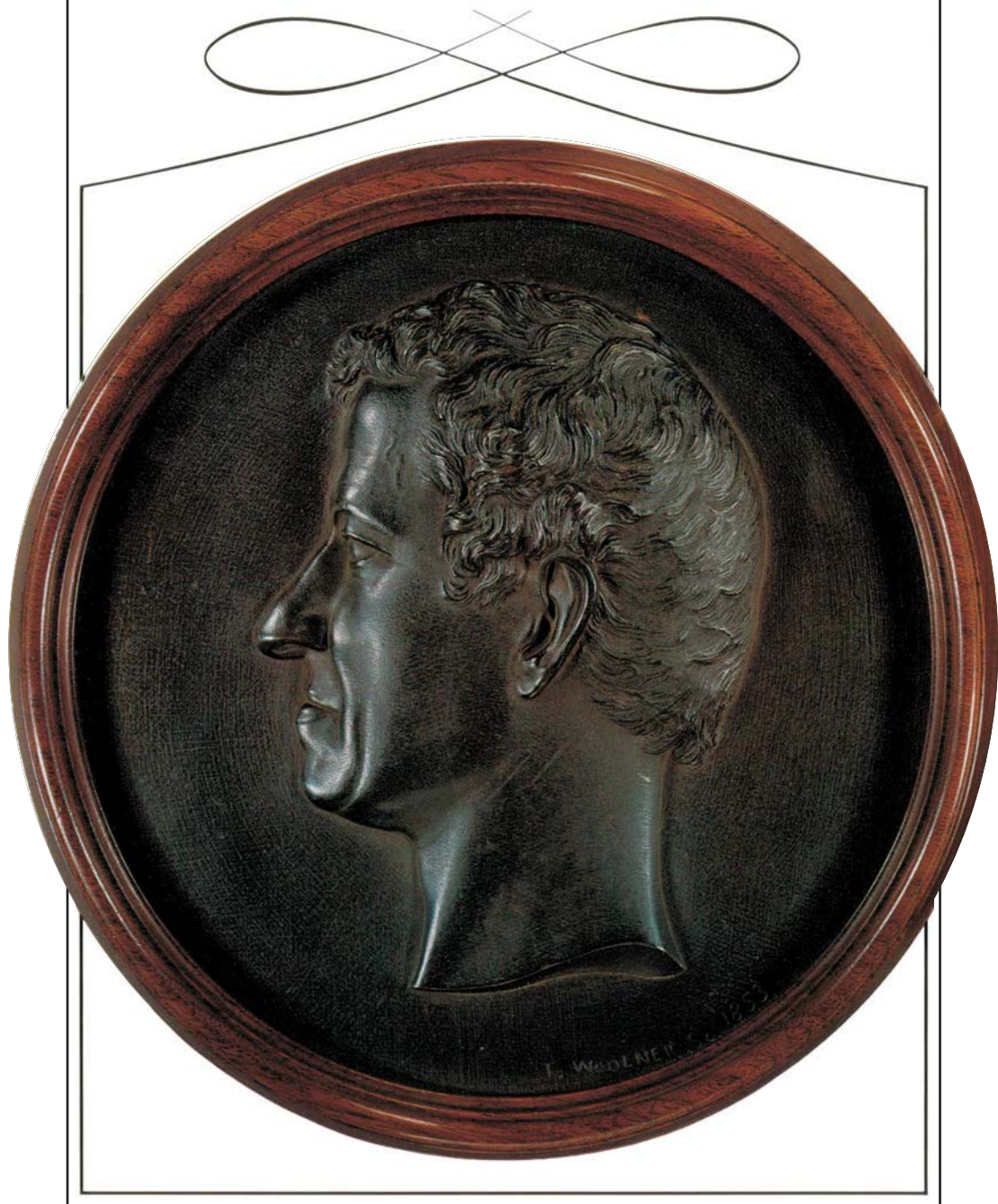


LA TROBEANA



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

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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.
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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.



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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

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A Word from the President

It is with much pleasure that we feature in this edition of *La Trobeana* an article contributed by the emerging historian Dr Ashleigh Green, the most recent holder of the La Trobe Society Fellowship at State Library Victoria. You will recall that her research for the Fellowship led to her presentation of the AGL Shaw Lecture for 2023 and publication in this journal in July 2023 of her paper ‘Law and Order Under La Trobe: The First Prisons of Port Phillip’. This time, she has explored in her article ‘La Trobe and the Establishment of Yarra Bend Asylum’, an overlooked area of La Trobe’s administration in his hands-on approach to the establishment in 1848 of the first permanent institution established in Victoria devoted to the treatment of the mentally ill.

In her article ‘A Pilgrimage to La Trobe Sites in Switzerland’, Helen Botham takes the reader with her on a tour she undertook in 2023 of some of the places in Switzerland frequented by Charles Joseph La Trobe. She brings to her research a deep interest in garden history and botany, the collections of nineteenth-century botanical specimens from Port Phillip in the Herbarium at the University of Neuchâtel being of particular interest. One memorable excursion was the day spent in and around Erlenbach where La Trobe made the acquaintance of Pastor Samuel Studer in 1825, and following in their footsteps with a visit to the Stockhorn, a mountain in the Bernese Alps.

Using much information and striking images gathered on his recent visit to Switzerland, John Botham has contributed a study of La Trobe’s connection with *Schloss Oberhofen* on Lake Thun and its owners, the

Pourtalès family. Charles Joseph La Trobe was welcomed into the family during his visits to Neuchâtel, and as a trusted friend toured North America and Mexico for two years from 1832 as guide and mentor to their elder son Albert.

Given that next year marks the 150th anniversary of the death of Charles Joseph La Trobe, it is particularly timely to report that the headstone of his grave in the churchyard of St Michael the Archangel Church in Litlington, East Sussex, has been repaired and renovated. Thanks to their deep interest in history and its preservation, and to their generosity, members Loreen and John Chambers have enabled restoration of the lettering and a thorough cleaning of the headstone which will make the memorial against the wall of the church much more easily identifiable. Susan Priestley’s philosophical ‘Reflections on La Trobe’s Gravestone’ contributes fittingly to our remembrance of the man and Lieutenant-Governor.

It is with great pleasure that we congratulate Helen Botham who was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) in the 2024 King’s Birthday Honours for ‘service to childhood literacy, and to historical preservation’. In her career as a speech pathologist Helen provided training for teachers of Indigenous students in remote communities, and in more recent years valuable leadership in preserving and promoting La Trobe’s Cottage.

Diane Gardiner AM
Hon President
C J La Trobe Society

La Trobe and the establishment of Yarra Bend Asylum (1848)

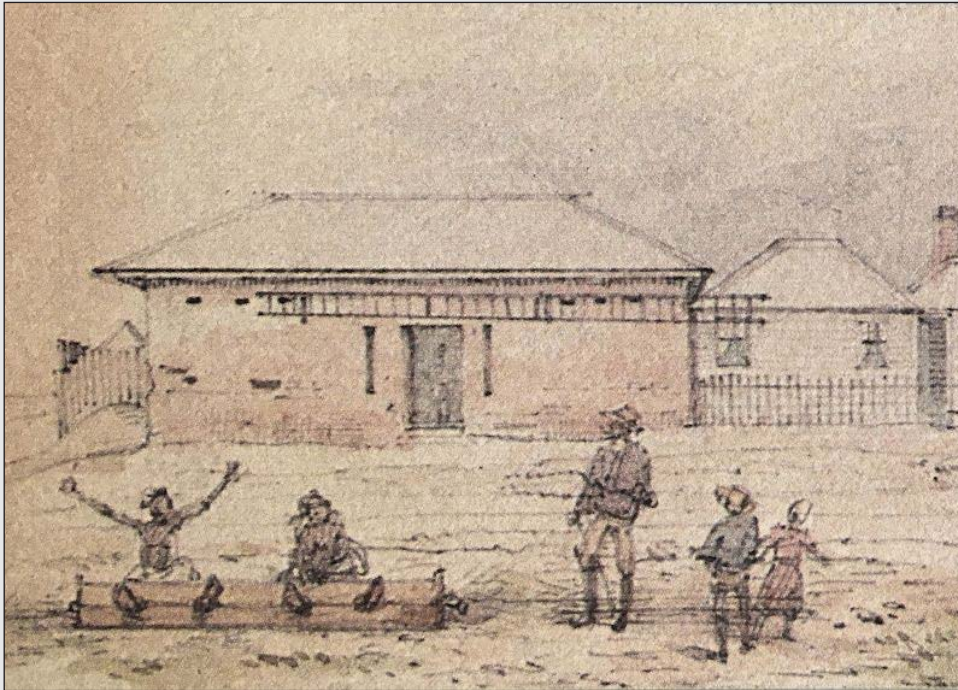
By Dr Ashleigh Green

Ashleigh is a tutor in classics and archaeology at the University of Melbourne and the author of the book, *Birds in Roman Life and Myth* (Routledge, 2023). She has worked as a volunteer guide for the National Trust at Old Melbourne Gaol, and more recently as an historical tour guide throughout Melbourne and at Old Geelong Gaol. As the 2022 La Trobe Society Fellow at State Library Victoria, she researched the untold stories of the state's very first penal and psychiatric institutions.

Charles Joseph La Trobe is recognised as having had an active hand in overseeing the establishment of many public amenities and institutions in Victoria, but to date his part in the creation of Melbourne's first lunatic asylum at Yarra Bend has been overlooked. This paper explores his role in the building, financing, and staffing of the Yarra Bend Asylum that opened in 1848. It charts the many difficulties that plagued the Asylum's construction and explores how 'lunatics' were treated before, during, and shortly after its completion. Readers are advised that this paper uses antiquated terms such as 'lunatic' and 'lunacy'. In the nineteenth century, these were medically accepted terms with specific meanings. I have retained the use of the word 'lunatic' for the purposes of clarity and continuity, as the people of Port Phillip used this word to refer to a wide variety of individuals, and no modern terminology captures the same variety of meanings.

When La Trobe arrived in 1839 to oversee the growth of the Port Phillip District, one of the colonists' most pressing concerns was the

need for public works, and in particular the need for a lunatic asylum, with many ranking under the impression that what they paid in taxes was not being returned to them in the form of civic improvements.¹ Compounding this problem was the lack of independent power the District had, as final authority on most matters rested with Governor Gipps in Sydney. Public works at Port Phillip could only be erected through the inclusion of costed proposals on Estimates presented to the Legislative Council in Sydney. They were often indifferent to, or ignorant of, the needs of Port Phillip, meaning that success depended on La Trobe personally persuading the Governor or Colonial Secretary of their necessity through private correspondence. In his time as Superintendent, La Trobe proposed and saw to completion a number of works, including the Supreme Court, Immigration Barracks, Government Offices, Police Court, and Hospital.² This paper will consider the particular case of the District's first lunatic asylum, which would come to be known as Yarra Bend Asylum, exploring the many obstacles to its construction and outlining how its completion depended on La Trobe's personal intervention.³



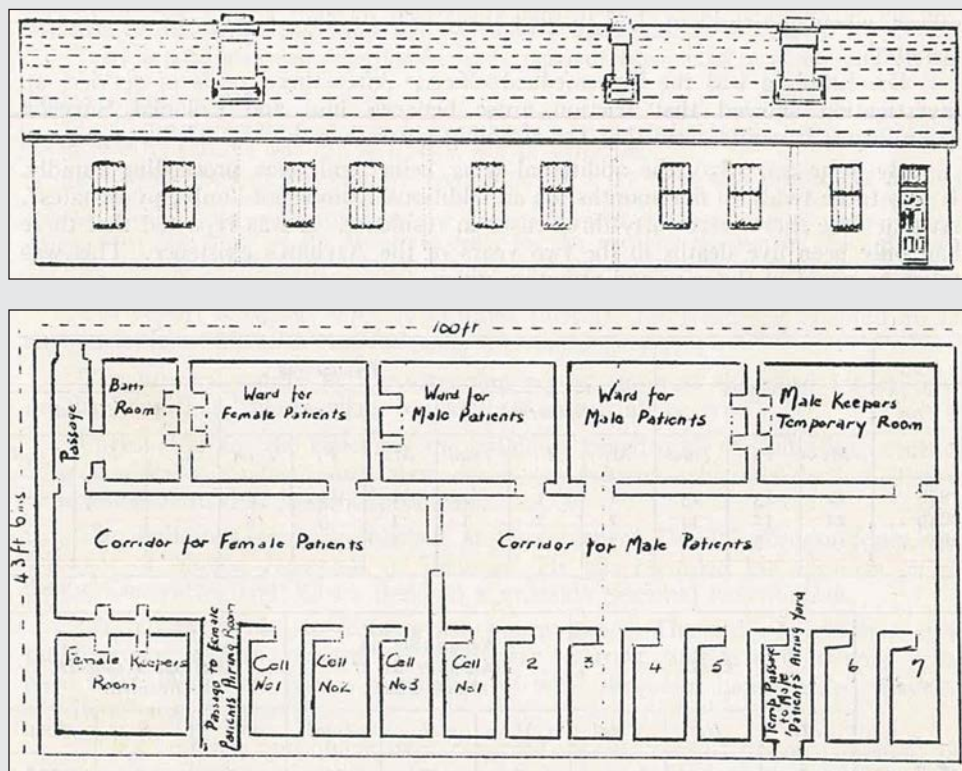
William Strutt, 1825–1915, artist
The old lock-up and stocks, Market Square (1839), 1850
 Pencil and wash
 Detail from *Victoria the Golden*, plate 6
 (Parliamentary Library of Victoria)
 The new watch house on Eastern Hill had a room
 appropriated for the reception of lunatic prisoners from 1844

‘Lunacy’ in Port Phillip

Demand for an asylum was strong even in the earliest days of Port Phillip, as colonists believed they were in a perpetual state of crisis when it came to the number of lunatics in their population. In the 1840s, the word ‘lunatic’ encompassed a range of meanings and conditions, but generally referred to individuals whose behaviour caused an unacceptable level of disruption or distress in the community.⁴ The causes for this were varied, from addiction to mental illness, but in Port Phillip there was a special trepidation about those who were deemed ‘temporarily’ insane, as opposed to ‘hopeless’ or ‘incurable’ cases. Many of those judged temporarily insane were addicted to alcohol or had drunk themselves into stupors and begun behaving erratically; some were suffering from delirium tremens.⁵ Extreme poverty might also cause someone to be judged as a lunatic, and many lunatics were charged with vagrancy simply so they could be incarcerated in the gaol and given shelter and medical care.⁶ Deserted wives were at particular risk, especially if they had children.⁷ Those who attempted suicide were also deemed ‘temporarily insane’ and would be detained for their own safety. Colonists blamed these cases on factors such as ‘an unsettled and migratory population’, ‘intemperate and passionate

indulgence’ and ‘commercial difficulties and disasters’.⁸ One commentator declared that ‘in a colony where the fluctuations of trade and the large amount of intoxicating drink consumed, lead to temporary insanity; the Government is inexcusable for delaying so long to establish an asylum or Hospital for the insane’.⁹

From the 1830s to mid-1840s, lunatics were confined in the overcrowded and primitive gaol or watch house facilities and ministered to by the Assistant Colonial Surgeon, Dr Patrick Cussen.¹⁰ The worst cases were sent to Tarban Creek Asylum in Sydney in accordance with the 1843 *Dangerous Lunatics Act*. When Melbourne Gaol was completed in 1845, lunatics were confined there alongside the general prison population. Colonists expressed distress at these measures, with one lamenting: ‘Our lunatics are wasting their time in the common gaol... they are degraded in this manner not from any crime but from the negligence of the government’.¹¹ In most of the records we see colonists express sympathy, fear, and frustration in equal measure: sympathy for the plight of these people, fear of what they might do if left to wander freely, and frustration that there was no place in which they could be safely housed besides the gaol.



Plan of Yarra Bend's first wing (1848)

Source: John Bostock, *The Dawn of Australian Psychiatry: an account of the measures taken for the care of mental invalids... to the year 1850*, Sydney: Australian Medical Association, 1968, p.159
Plan formerly in possession of Dr W Ernest Jones

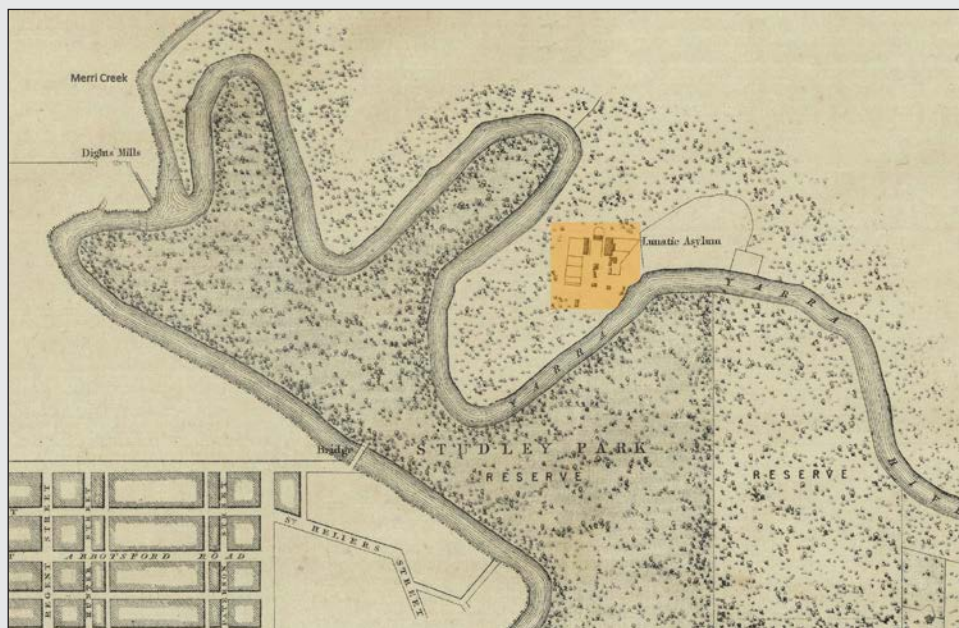
1845

Throughout 1845, the people of Port Phillip were vocal about their need for an asylum. Far from alleviating the problem, the opening of Melbourne Gaol seemed to impress how inappropriate it was to house lunatics with criminals. Colonists complained that their taxes were being misused, saying: 'We have many lunatics, and plenty of funds to build and endow an asylum – but we cannot get one'.¹² These complaints were often addressed directly to La Trobe, with one saying: 'Recollect, sir, we require Bridges, Roads, Wharf, Magazine, and very, very urgently, a Lunatic Asylum'.¹³ Melbourne Gaol's completion even led some to propose that the old gaol at the intersection of Collins and King Streets could serve as a temporary lunatic asylum, with some going so far as to suggest that if the government could not be persuaded to hire and pay employees, funds for salaries could be raised through voluntary donations. Though this was never carried out, the mere suggestion impresses just how urgent the situation was.¹⁴

The need for an asylum was finally put before the Legislative Council in September and the matter was discussed with great interest.

The Colonial Secretary agreed that the work was necessary and promised he would promote its erection. Eight lunatics were at that time confined in Melbourne Gaol, while many more were said to be in the care of their families and 'retained under great inconvenience'.¹⁵ The Council agreed to vote £1,000 for the construction of an asylum, but Governor Gipps acknowledged from the outset that the sum was unlikely to cover the true cost of the establishment, saying:

I am induced to bring forward the proposal to appropriate the sum of £1,000 towards building a Lunatic Asylum at Melbourne, solely by the urgency with which the want of a Lunatic Asylum has been pressed upon me by the local authorities; and though I propose to the Council the appropriation of this money, I am by no means certain that it will be desirable, or even possible, to commence the proposed asylum in the course of the ensuing year – no plan of the building having yet been submitted to me for my approval.¹⁶



Electoral District of Collingwood, c.1858-59 (detail)

Department of Crown Lands and Survey

Historic Plan Collection, PROV VPRS 8168/P0002, ELEC42

The Asylum is highlighted. Top left, Merri Creek and Dight's Mills at the Falls.

Johnston Street, lower left, leads to a footbridge accessing Studley Park Reserve

This tentative green light meant that work on the establishment of the District's first dedicated asylum could finally begin.

1846

In January of 1846, Dr Cussen reported to the Resident Judge that the lunatics confined in Melbourne Gaol were 'daily becoming worse, owing to their being confined in an improper place'. He urged the government to waste no time in appropriating the funds voted by the Legislative Council.¹⁷ On 3 February there was a 'record' number of lunatics in Melbourne, leading La Trobe to ask Gipps if some could be sent to Sydney.¹⁸ Gipps wrote back that Tarban Creek was 'so full that it is officially reported to me that no more patients can be received.'¹⁹ Gipps repeated this in another letter on 27 February, adding that he was trying to find separate accommodation for convict lunatics; if they were moved, lunatics from Port Phillip could be received. In the same letter, he told La Trobe that the superintendent of Tarban Creek, John Digby, was helping the Colonial Architect, Mortimer Lewis, prepare a plan for the Port Phillip lunatic asylum on a 'reduced scale'.²⁰ On 6 March he sent the plan, saying that Lewis estimated it could be built for £3,000. Gipps, however, expressed doubt even at this sum, adding almost apologetically that 'We cannot send you any specification or Estimate because we do not know the Expense of Building, nor

the price of materials, nor even of what materials you would erect it, nor the nature of the foundation which will be required.'²¹ It would not be until 9 June 1846 that Gipps had the opportunity to propose the additional £2,000 for the project, which was voted on 21 October.²² Relief that construction of an asylum was finally due to begin in Melbourne was overshadowed by frustration at the time it took to get started.

In the meantime, Tarban Creek was still desperately overcrowded. In a bid to alleviate pressure, an act was passed curtailing the powers of justices to detain lunatics. La Trobe issued a circular to country magistrates that read: 'under the clause in question (7 Vic. No.14, sec.1) the powers of the Justices are strictly confined to the cases of dangerous lunatics, or dangerous idiots... under circumstances denoting a derangement of mind, and a purpose of committing suicide, or some crime'.²³ In essence, the law could only intervene if a supposed lunatic endangered life or property, or attempted suicide. As a result of this act, on 14 March 1846, five lunatics were discharged from Melbourne Gaol. Three days later, it was reported that one of them, Thomas Crozier, had died by suicide, while another man was 'creating disturbances in the public streets'. Citizens lamented Crozier's death and bitterly perceived that the object of the act was 'to save the Government the expense of taking charge of these unfortunate people'.²⁴

By now, La Trobe had received the plans for the asylum and it was reported that 'the gross area of the building [was] to be two hundred and fifty feet by two hundred feet' (seventy-six by sixty-one metres) and that, if the plan were conformed to, it would cost around £6,000, exclusive of internal fittings. The official guidance at this time was that the asylum should cost 'any sum or sums of money not exceeding one thousand pounds... it being understood that the whole expense shall not exceed three thousand pounds'.²⁵

With the plan set to cost six times as much as was granted, and twice as much as was promised, La Trobe's task was made no easier by the fact that Port Phillip required a new Clerk of Works.²⁶ The current Clerk of Works, James Rattenbury, had held the post for six years, and earned the ire of Gipps and La Trobe for his lacklustre performance. He was dismissed as 1845 came to a close, with newspapers commenting that 'the event was not unexpected'.²⁷ Gipps favoured appointing Henry Ginn in Rattenbury's place, as Ginn had former experience as Clerk of Works in Sydney. He was appointed to the role on 31 March 1846 and took up his post in Port Phillip on 7 May.²⁸ Newspapers reported on Ginn's appointment in April, explicitly mentioning that work on the asylum would only commence once he arrived.²⁹

As Ginn was settling in, the Town Council met to discuss various issues, and the belligerent Councillor McCombie brought forward a motion that they should petition the Legislative Council for an explanation regarding the delay to the construction of buildings for which money had been voted at the last session of Council, these being the Police Office (£824), Powder Magazine (£2,000), and Lunatic Asylum (£1,000). There was some uncertainty about whether to proceed with the petition, as it was thought unseemly to go behind La Trobe's back, but Councillor John Fawkner urged action, declaring that previous correspondence from La Trobe had been 'vague and unsatisfactory'. Why not expend the money that had been voted, he argued, and if the sums were insufficient, simply on a reduced scale?³⁰

At last, on 8 July 1846, a call for tenders for the erection of a lunatic asylum near Melbourne was issued from the Clerk of Works' office.³¹ Inevitably, all tenders received for the asylum exceeded the amount granted for its construction, so it was decided that 'nearly the whole of the subsidiary buildings [should be] dispensed with'.³² A second call for tenders went out on 31 July, this time to construct only 'one wing' of the lunatic asylum.³³ This wing was 'a single storey rectangular structure with a dark

axial corridor cum day room flanked by wards on one side and cells on the other'.³⁴ With its rows of cells and narrow corridors, it was 'designed on the lines of a gaol'.³⁵ This punitive rather than therapeutic design is perhaps owed to the fact that Lewis had experience building prisons, or that they expected many patients to be ex-convicts.³⁶ According to Garryowen, a Mr James Balmain was appointed Superintendent of Works for the asylum at six shillings a day, and by the end of August the builder James Webb had obtained the contract for artificer's work.³⁷ The site fixed upon for construction was at the junction of the Yarra River and the Merri Creek, adjoining the Aboriginal school reserve.³⁸

1847

Construction of the asylum had finally begun in earnest, but in the meantime many lunatics were still languishing in Melbourne Gaol. Throughout 1847, an anonymous correspondent going by the name 'Nemo' wrote to the *Port Phillip Gazette* about alleged abuses of lunatics occurring in the gaol. His first scandal concerned a lunatic 'named Sydenham' who had been roughly handled by turnkeys despite having a broken arm. Nemo reported other examples of 'tyrannical' treatment by the gaoler Mr George Wintle and the turnkeys, and concluded by saying, 'It is to be hoped, Mr Editor, that his Honor Mr La Trobe will cause proper enquiries to be made into the matter'.³⁹ Another scandal was the case of a 'supposed lunatic' called Thomas George Bolton who died in custody. An inquest into his death discovered he had been 'ill-treated by some of the turnkeys and prisoners'. The jury eventually deemed he had died of natural causes, but that brutal treatment had increased his suffering.⁴⁰

This inquest led to the appointment of a board to inquire into the alleged misconduct of the officers, but La Trobe intervened to order a cessation of the investigation so he could appoint a commission examining 'the whole of the details and discipline of the establishment, with a view to entire reformation, and the separation of the lunatics from the criminals'.⁴¹ Nemo wrote again, full of hope at the commission, and regaled several more rumours about misconduct at the gaol. He would be disappointed two and a half months later when a verdict of 'not guilty' was returned and Wintle was cleared of charges.

After this commission, allegations of abuse continued, this time from a former turnkey.⁴² Dr Cussen also witnessed Wintle beating a female lunatic, Jessie Miller. He reported this incident to La Trobe and another inquiry was conducted, but Wintle was once again acquitted. Full of fire and vitriol at this outcome,

the *Gazette* charged La Trobe to take action.⁴³ As the senior government servant in the District, La Trobe was deemed to have final responsibility for the welfare of those confined at the gaol, yet he was bound to uphold the official results of the various inquiries and commissions, which were sadly subject to corruption and obfuscation.

1848

At the start of 1848 the asylum was nearing completion. Perhaps mindful of the scandals at the gaol, La Trobe showed special interest in seeing the asylum properly staffed. He advertised for the positions of Superintendent and Matron, advising that applicants 'should be possessed of unimpeached character' and that preference would be given to those with extensive experience.⁴⁴ His care in appointing a suitable superintendent only earned more scorn, however, as a board appointed by La Trobe complained that he had ignored their recommendations for the post because he wished to wait for a Mr George Watson to be sent from Sydney.⁴⁵ This had been a sore point for some time; frustration with the government had even led to a petition for the removal of La Trobe as Superintendent, with delays regarding the lunatic asylum among the many grievances, most notably the fact that he preferred to send to Sydney for a superintendent rather than employ a resident of Port Phillip. La Trobe's preferred man, Watson, was a former clerk of the lunatic asylum at Tarban Creek. Given his experience, one can understand why La Trobe chose him.⁴⁶

Throughout early 1848, various tenders were called for internal fittings at the asylum.⁴⁷ At last, 'one wing only' of the asylum was completed, with enough room for about twenty-five patients and ten cells fitted to house 'violent lunatics'. The keeper's quarters were still in progress and on track to be finished in four months, at which point ten additional patients could be admitted.⁴⁸ The reduced scale meant that many were unimpressed, with one declaring, 'We have been surprised to learn, notwithstanding the fuss which has been made about the Asylum, that it only possesses accommodations for about a dozen patients.' In September, Mr Watson arrived with his family to take charge of the facility.⁴⁹ One week later it was reported that 'All the necessary arrangements for the transfer of the lunatics from the Gaol to their new quarters have been effected', though owing to a technicality three could not be transferred as they had been committed as vagrants and not as lunatics. A report on the state of Melbourne Gaol in August 1848 held that there were ninety-eight inmates in total, thirteen of whom were lunatics.⁵⁰ The *Argus* reported on their transportation in early October:

Yesterday morning the following lunatics was removed in vans from the Gaol to their new quarters at the Lunatic Asylum on the Merri Creek: Samuel and Sarah Smylie, (brother and sister) John Burns, Amelia Ashmore, Jessie Miller, Mary Purcell, Mary Jones, Bridget Robinson, Eliza Richardson, and James Oliver. Burns and Richardson shed tears, on ascertaining they were leaving their old abode, where they had received so much kindness at the hands of the Gaoler, although conscious they were going to more comfortable quarters.⁵¹

Given the scandals around Wintle the gaoler, one wonders if this comment is tongue-in-cheek. Later that month, two additional patients were received, David McCoy and Zephaniah Smith. A superannuated government officer named Nicholson was received the next day, owing to him twice attempting suicide.⁵²

Improvements to the asylum continued piecemeal over the coming months and years. In 1848, the Legislative Council voted £1,600 for the erection of enclosing walls to the asylum yards, with Ginn putting out the call for tenders on 1 May 1849.⁵³ Though it would shortly become overcrowded, for now it was serviceable, La Trobe issued a notice advising how entry to the asylum could be procured, citing 'the 11th section of the Act of the Governor and Council, 7 Victoria No.14'. There seems to have been some confusion about how the guidelines should work in practice, however, as the newspaper reported that a man applied to commit a lunatic but was denied since he lacked the Governor's sanction. He was told to take the certificate to the Superintendent's office to discover whether the magistrates had any jurisdiction independent of Sydney. It was reported that the man did this, but as he did not return the next day 'it [was] presumed his visit to Mr. La Trobe proved ineffectual.'⁵⁴

By the letter of the law, the Governor did indeed have ultimate authority over the admission of lunatics to the Asylum, meaning that many confirmed lunatics had to languish in Melbourne Gaol while they waited for the necessary papers to travel to and from Sydney. One man named Pycroft, who had been in and out of gaol as a vagrant, was finally brought before the bench as a dangerous lunatic. The bench said they 'did not know what to do with him, as they could not send him to the asylum without first obtaining the consent of the Governor.' He was instead sent back to gaol as a vagrant for two months. This bought them enough time to obtain the necessary permission,



Unknown engraver
Yarra Bend patient, in the bag, 1862
 Wood engraving
 Pictures Collection, State Library
 Victoria, IMP00/06/62/48
 Published in *The Illustrated*
Melbourne Post, June 1862
 Such restraints were used in the early
 days of the asylum and in the gaols

but the report ended by saying that under present arrangements, 'the asylum... is of little use for some of the purposes contemplated in its erection, as there are two or three unfortunate creatures now at large who cannot gain admittance'.⁵⁵ As a result of this technicality, a handful of lunatics remained at Melbourne Gaol at any given time; on 7 March 1849, four lunatics were among the gaol population of 105. Warrants arrived for three of them the same month, by name John Allen, James Hudson, and Anne Tucker.⁵⁶ By December it was reported that there were twenty-one patients at the lunatic asylum and two at the gaol awaiting transfers. The increase in numbers led Mr Watson to apply for an additional keeper. Around this time, Dr Cussen also fielded applications for the roles of laundress and female attendants.⁵⁷ In December, the asylum also saw the first death of a patient, George Millward, a shepherd from the Murray River.⁵⁸

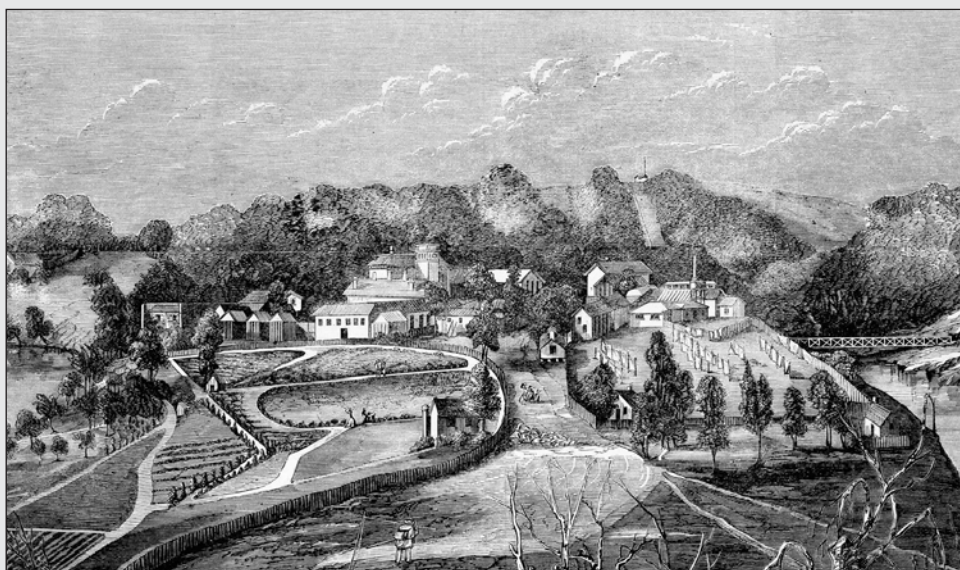
1849–1851

Transferring patients from the gaol to the asylum was risky business, as an incident on 8 March 1849 testifies. Three 'victims of lunacy', two men called Hudson and Allen and a woman named Mrs Tucker, were being transported in a

cab with Dr Cussen and a turnkey when Allen broke free and ran into the bush. The turnkey ran after him and Dr Cussen directed the cab driver to stay where he was before following them, coming just in time to rescue the turnkey from Allen's grasp. They managed to overpower Allen, and Cussen had the driver and turnkey guard him while he himself drove the cab to the asylum with his two remaining charges. Having safely delivered them, he returned to fetch Allen and the others. This incident was possibly a contributing factor in Cussen's death, as he took ill a few weeks later and succumbed to a heart condition. While he was ill, Dr Arthur O'Mullane took over his role at the asylum, and Dr Campbell at the gaol. After his death, Dr John Sullivan replaced him in the role of Colonial Surgeon and took medical charge of the gaol and asylum.⁵⁹

After almost a year of having to wait for the Governor's assent before patients could be committed, the power to commit finally passed to La Trobe by the Act of Council, 13 Victoria, No. 3, in August of 1849. In September, La Trobe issued more detailed instructions regarding the admission of insane persons to the asylum, outlining in painstaking detail the particular documents that were needed.⁶⁰ The committal process had finally been smoothed out, but fresh resentment against the government in Sydney was stirred up when plans were made to return the Port Phillip lunatics who had previously been transferred to Tarban Creek.⁶¹ Reports on the situation denounced the government, saying that 'in consequence of the Lunatic Asylum here being already full', the lunatics 'were put into tents, and most wretchedly attended'.⁶² Documents show that at the start of 1849 there were nine male and eleven female lunatics in the Asylum. During the year, twenty-two men and twelve women were admitted, of which number two men and five women were discharged, and three men and one woman died in custody, leaving twenty-six men and seventeen women remaining in the Asylum at the close of the year.⁶³

Plans were made to erect an additional wing, and in January of 1850 it was reported that 'Messrs. Brown and Ramsden, of Bourke-street, are the successful tenderers for the contract for the erection of the additional buildings'.⁶⁴ Until its completion, lunatics once again had to languish at the Melbourne Gaol. Fortunately, construction went smoothly, and toward the end of 1850 Ginn put out a call for tenders for fittings to the new wing.⁶⁵ On 11 February 1851, some twenty lunatics were transferred from Melbourne Gaol to the asylum. By 20 February, it was reported that twenty-six people had taken up residence, and the new wing was now full.



Frederick Grosse, 1828–1894, engraver
The Yarra Bend Asylum for the Insane, 1868

Wood engraving

Pictures Collection, State Library Victoria, IAN23/05/68/12
Published in The Illustrated Australian News, 23 May 1868

The asylum was suffering from a lack of drains and farming yards, but these tenders had been called for, and it was hoped the improvements would be made soon.⁶⁶

In July 1851, the Port Phillip District separated from New South Wales to become the independent colony of Victoria. Its lunatic asylum, which had officially been designated as a ward of the Tarban Creek Asylum, subsequently also became independent, and was officially

named the Yarra Bend Asylum. With this firm establishment, we can draw our narrative to a close. The construction of Yarra Bend Asylum touched upon many of the peculiar difficulties with which La Trobe and the colonial government had to contend, from rapid population growth to jurisdictional woes. It was beset by delays from all angles, but notwithstanding the frustrations of the colonists, this case study ultimately proves how integral La Trobe's personal efforts were to seeing public works completed in the District.

Endnotes

- ¹ *Port Phillip Gazette*, 26 September 1840, p.2. The demand for public works and associated frustration that La Trobe did not have the power to do more are outlined in John Barnes, *La Trobe: Traveller, Writer, Governor*, Canberra: Halstead Press, in association with State Library Victoria [and] La Trobe University 2017, pp.162–163.
- ² Dianne Reilly Drury, *La Trobe: The Making of a Governor*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2006, pp.152–155.
- ³ For more on the general history of Yarra Bend Asylum, see: C.R.D. Brothers, *Early Victorian Psychiatry, 1835–1905: an account of the care of the mentally ill in Victoria*, Melbourne: Government Printer, 1961; Catharine Coleborne, *Reading 'Madness': gender and difference in the colonial asylum in Victoria, Australia, 1848–1880s*, Perth, W.A.: Network Books, 2007; Lee-Ann Monk, *Attending Madness: at work in the Australian colonial asylum*, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2008; Richard Bonwick, *The History of Yarra Bend Lunatic Asylum*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Custom Book Centre, 2010; Colin Briton, *Outcasts, Mists and Shadows: a short history of institutional care around Yarra Bend, Melbourne*, Northcote, Vic.: Colin Briton, 2018; Jill Giese, *The Maddest Place on Earth*, North Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2018.
- ⁴ Leonard D. Smith, *Cure, Comfort and Safe Custody: public lunatic asylums in early nineteenth-century England*, London: Leicester University Press, 1999, pp.93–130. Smith compiles data on how people came to asylums in England and the varying reasons for admission, from 'mental abnormality' and 'intellectual deficit' to 'social dysfunction' (p.94).
- ⁵ Jean-Charles Sournia, *A History of Alcoholism*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990, p.103 explains that alcohol consumption was considered a form of madness. For alcohol consumption in the Port Phillip District and fears about its effects on crime and the social fabric, see: Milton Lewis, *A Rum State: alcohol and state policy in Australia, 1788–1988*, Canberra: AGPS Press, 1991, pp.4–6, 15.
- ⁶ For one example, see: *Port Phillip Gazette*, 26 March 1842, p.3. Robert Marr and James Nugent are two other instructive examples: *Port Phillip Patriot and Melbourne Advertiser*, 7 April 1842, p.2; 1 July 1845, p.2.

- 7 In the 1840s, female lunatics often outnumbered or equalled the number of male lunatics, a surprising statistic when men outnumbered women four to one in the general population of Port Phillip. Women were more at risk due to desertion and having fewer economic prospects than men; they were also more likely than men to be labelled as lunatics when they acted out in socially unacceptable ways or committed crimes. Of the fourteen women confined at Melbourne Gaol under criminal charges in 1848, for example, twelve were said to be 'more or less insane' (*Port Phillip Patriot and Morning Advertiser*, 23 August 1848, p.2). For more, see Christina Twomey, *Deserted and Destitute: motherhood, wife desertion and colonial welfare*, Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2002.
- 8 *Port Phillip Gazette and Settler's Journal*, 12 August 1846, p.2. These observations are generally borne out by demographic studies: A.G.L. Shaw, *A History of the Port Phillip District: Victoria before Separation*, Melbourne: Miegunyah Press, 1996, pp.78-79.
- 9 *Port Phillip Gazette and Settler's Journal*, 4 April 1846, p.2.
- 10 In early 1844, part of the Eastern Hill Watch House on Little Collins Street was appropriated to serve as a makeshift asylum: *Port Phillip Gazette*, 13 January 1844, p.2; *Sydney Record*, 13 Jan 1844, p.114. For more about Cussen, see Walter Heale, 'District Surgeon to Chief Medical Officer: pioneer public health practitioners in Port Phillip District', *La Trobeana* vol.17, no.3, November 2018, pp.15-23. Garryowen also provides a brief profile of Cussen and includes an anecdote about a female lunatic housed in one of the early gaols attacking and almost killing him: Garryowen, *Chronicles of Early Melbourne, 1835 to 1852: historical, and anecdotal and personal*, Melbourne: Fergusson and Mitchell, 1888, Vol.1, pp.48-49.
- 11 *Port Phillip Gazette and Settler's Journal*, 12 August 1846, p.2.
- 12 *Port Phillip Patriot and Melbourne Advertiser*, 26 September 1845, p.2; 29 September 1845, p.2.
- 13 *Ibid.*, 2 August 1845, p.2.
- 14 *Port Phillip Gazette*, 13 August 1845, p.2; 20 August 1845, p.2.
- 15 *Melbourne Courier*, 7 November 1845, p.5.
- 16 *Ibid.*, 31 October 1845, p.5.
- 17 *Ibid.*, 9 January 1846, p.2.
- 18 *Port Phillip Herald*, 3 February 1846; La Trobe to Colonial Secretary (Deas Thomson), 16 February 1846, PROV VPRS 16 (Microfilm 2142) Outward letter books, 46/132.
- 19 Gipps to La Trobe, 25 February 1846, in A.G.L. Shaw (ed.), *Gipps-La Trobe Correspondence 1839-1846*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1989, p.380, letter 377.
- 20 *Ibid.*, 27 February 1846, in Shaw, p.371, letter 378.
- 21 *Ibid.*, 6 March 1846, in Shaw, p.382, letter 379.
- 22 *Votes and Proceedings of the Legislative Council of New South Wales*, 1846, p.101. See 1845, p.175 for original vote of £1,000.
- 23 Quoted in *Port Phillip Gazette and Settler's Journal*, 4 April 1846, p.2.
- 24 *Port Phillip Patriot and Morning Advertiser*, 17 March 1846, p.2. The effect of the clause was felt acutely in urban and rural communities alike, as on 4 April it was reported that, as a consequence of the circular, 'magistrates in the country do not deem themselves justified in issuing warrants for the apprehension of insane persons under almost any circumstance', *Port Phillip Gazette and Settler's Journal*, 4 April 1846, p.2.
- 25 *Port Phillip Patriot and Morning Advertiser*, 7 April 1846, p.2.
- 26 Deas Thomson to La Trobe, 20 February 1846 and La Trobe to Deas Thomson, 10 March 1846, cited in Shaw, p.380, letter 377, n3.
- 27 *Port Phillip Gazette and Settler's Journal*, 31 December 1845, p.2.
- 28 Gipps to La Trobe, 27 March 1846, in Shaw, p.385, letter 382. He proved himself a capable public servant and became Colonial Architect after Separation in 1851.
- 29 *Port Phillip Patriot and Morning Advertiser*, 23 April 1846, p.2.
- 30 *Port Phillip Gazette and Settler's Journal*, 20 June 1846, p.2.
- 31 *Port Phillip Patriot and Morning Advertiser*, 16 July 1846, p.4.
- 32 *Melbourne Argus*, 7 August 1846, p.2.
- 33 *Ibid.*, 14 August 1846, p.1.
- 34 James Semple Kerr, *Out of Sight Out of Mind: Australia's places of confinement, 1788-1988*, Sydney: National Trust of Australia, 1988, p.83.
- 35 Eric Cunningham Dax, *Asylum to Community: the development of the mental hygiene service in Victoria, Australia*, Melbourne: F.W. Cheshire, 1961, p.14.
- 36 Elizabeth Malcolm, 'Australian Asylum Architecture through German Eyes: Kew, Melbourne, 1867' *Health and History*, Vol.11, 2009, pp. 46-64 (49).
- 37 Garryowen, Vol.1, p.47; *Port Phillip Gazette and Settler's Journal*, 29 August 1846, p.3. Presumably the artificer's work involved making bars for the doors and windows.
- 38 For the history of this site, see Ian Clark, *A Bend in the Yarra: a history of the Merri Creek Protectorate Station and Merri Creek Aboriginal School, 1841-1851*, Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2004.
- 39 *Port Phillip Gazette and Settler's Journal*, 9 June 1847, p.3.
- 40 *Geelong Advertiser and Squatters' Advocate*, 28 May 1847, p.2.
- 41 *Melbourne Argus*, 11 June 1847, p.2.
- 42 *Port Phillip Gazette and Settler's Journal*, 23 June 1847, p.3; 29 September 1847, p.2; 13 December 1847, p.2.
- 43 *Port Phillip Patriot and Morning Advertiser*, 30 December 1847, p.2; *Port Phillip Gazette and Settler's Journal*, 21 February 1848, p.2.
- 44 *Port Phillip Patriot and Morning Advertiser*, 19 May 1848, p.4.
- 45 *Melbourne Argus*, 4 August 1848, p.2.

- 46 *Port Phillip Patriot and Morning Advertiser*, 4 July 1848, p.2; *Melbourne Argus*, 25 August 1848, p.2. See Monk, pp.27–37 for an in-depth account of the initial staff at the asylum.
- 47 Bedsteads: *Melbourne Argus*, 5 May 1848, p.4. Tables and forms: 2 May 1848, p.1. James Webb received the tender for lining the cell doors with sheet metal for £60 10s. Ellen Stephens was contracted to produce clothing for inmates at the price of £1 4s 6d. per suit, *Melbourne Argus*, 31 March 1848, p.4.
- 48 *Argus*, 10 October 1848, p.2.
- 49 *Port Phillip Gazette and Settler's Journal*, 2 October 1848, p.4; *Argus*, 22 September 1848, p.2.
- 50 *Argus*, 29 September 1848, p.2. *Port Phillip Patriot and Morning Advertiser*, 23 August 1848, p.2. *Melbourne Argus*, 4 August 1848, p.2.
- 51 *Argus*, 6 October 1848, p.2.
- 52 *Ibid.*, 24 October 1848, p.2.
- 53 *Port Phillip Gazette and Settler's Journal*, 17 June 1848, p.2; *Argus*, 15 May 1849, p.1.
- 54 *Argus*, 10 October 1848, p.1–2.
- 55 *Ibid.*, 20 October 1848, p.2.
- 56 *Port Phillip Gazette and Settler's Journal*, 7 March 1849, p.2; *Argus*, 13 March 1849, p.4.
- 57 *Argus*, 5 December 1848, p.4; 8 December 1848, p.3.
- 58 He had been brought to the gaol in November as a 'dangerous lunatic', *Argus*, 10 November 1848, p.2. The cause of death was cited as 'intemperance', *Melbourne Daily News*, 20 December 1848, p.2. Another report describes him as being 'hocused' at some public house on his way to Melbourne, perhaps indicating methanol poisoning or alcohol addiction and subsequent withdrawals caused his death, *Argus*, 19 December 1848, p.2.
- 59 *Melbourne Daily News*, 9 March 1849, p.2; *Argus*, 13 April 1849, p.2; 19 July 1849, p.2.
- 60 *Argus*, 6 August 1849, p.1.
- 61 *Melbourne Daily News*, 19 March 1849, p.2. One commentator remarked that they would be happy to take back the lunatics if Sydney would return the taxes they had appropriated from the district, *Argus*, 3 December 1849, p.2.
- 62 *Port Phillip Gazette and Settler's Journal*, 11 December 1849, p.2; *Argus*, 10 December 1849, p.2.
- 63 *Melbourne Daily News*, 1 August 1850, p.2. Patient numbers from 1848 to 1850 are also reproduced in Bostock, p.160.
- 64 *Argus*, 18 January 1850, p.2.
- 65 *Ibid.*, 21 November 1850, p.4.
- 66 *Ibid.*, 19 February 1851, p.2; *Melbourne Daily News*, 20 Feb. 1851, p.2. For more on operations in these early years, see Bostock pp.158–162.

A Pilgrimage to La Trobe sites in Switzerland

By Helen Botham OAM

Helen Botham is a garden history researcher and author of *La Trobe's Jolimont: A Walk Round My Garden* (2006). She was the foundation chair of the Friends of La Trobe's Cottage and is currently Coordinator of the La Trobe's Cottage Management Team in addition to being its garden coordinator. She has developed a special interest in La Trobe as botanist.

In June 2023 Professor Jason Grant, of the University of Neuchâtel, escorted Helen and John Botham on a three-day tour of La Trobe sites in Switzerland. Professor Grant is the Director of the Herbarium at the Institute of Biology of the University which holds many hundreds of botanical specimens sent to Switzerland by La Trobe. He has developed a keen interest in the La Trobe specimens, which are not yet fully indexed, and their tour contributed to his understanding of La Trobe, his family, his life and his scientific interests.

This article derives from an illustrated presentation given to La Trobe's Cottage volunteers at Domain House on 23 April 2024. Sites mentioned in the article may be located in the maps at page 25.

In the Autumn of 1824, Charles Joseph La Trobe had set out from England to travel to Switzerland. It would seem that his object was the Moravian community at Montmirail, a small settlement on the north-east shore of Lake Neuchâtel, eight kilometres from the town of Neuchâtel.¹ The Director of the School was Rev. Wilhelm Verbeek, whose wife Dorothy was related to the La Trobe family by marriage; John Barnes suggests that La Trobe may have already known Verbeek and some of the female teaching staff.²

La Trobe records on page 1 of *The Alpenstock* that he approached Montmirail from the north: he would have reached Basel on the Rhine, and as he then headed south, he stopped to sketch the imposing *Château Angenstein* that is on the banks of the Birse River. He titled this his 'first sketch in Switzerland, October 1824'.³ He relates that he then toiled through 'the deep and secluded defiles in the Jura, which intersecting its chain from Basel to Bienne, form to the N.E the valley of the Birse, and to the S.W that of the Suze, two mountain streams of considerable volume and impetuosity'.⁴ The Birse Valley led

him to Tavannes, the source of that river, and the Suze would have led him to Lake Bienne, leading to his final track to Montmirail and on to Neuchâtel.⁵ Barnes suggests that Neuchâtel's proximity to the Moravian community at Montmirail may have been decisive in the choice of Neuchâtel as his place to stay.⁶ So, 'on entering this little town which I had for some time back glanced at upon my map, as a temporary home, I felt every disposition to lay aside my staff and to have done with roaming for the present'.⁷ Having made the decision to halt at Neuchâtel, he 'entered into a contract, which left me undisputed master of an apartment about fourteen feet square'.⁸

We have two clues about the location of this apartment: in October 1826, he revealed that his quarters were near the Town Hall: 'one day in the week there was an extraordinary bustle upon the steps of the Hôtel de Ville, near which my quarters were situated'.⁹ Three years later, on 19 November 1829: 'I finally took up my winters abode in the Faubourg'.¹⁰ The Faubourg leads off the Town Hall Square, so we can assume his quarters were near to that corner.

**Stefano Lori,
photographer
Hôtel de Ville
Neuchâtel, 2000**

La Trobe's
apartment may
have been in
the building at
bottom left



**Helen Botham, photographer
Collegiate Church, Neuchâtel, 2023**



Monsieur Wilhelm Verbeek, director 1821-1835

Montmirail Private Collection
The La Trobe family connection with his wife
Dorothy led La Trobe to Montmirail



**Jean-Henri Baumann,
1801-1858, artist
Vue prise depuis
la tour de Montmirail,
1832**

Montmirail Private
Collection
View showing the garden
at the rear of Montmirail
and the river flowing
between Lake Bienné
and Lake Neuchâtel.
Jolimont is the hill just
right of centre.

We were keen to identify a likely location, and noticed as we walked near the Town Hall that there are large buildings of four and five stories in this area with gable windows indicating rooms in the lofts. Perhaps La Trobe took one of these.

Having arranged his accommodation, he spent the winter of 1824–25 in ‘the quiet of my little chamber’ with ‘my books, and the kind and winning attentions of the few who knew of my existence at that time among them.’¹¹ During this time, he had ‘risen early, had my stated hours for this or that study; had sat long and patiently at my desk; and confined my rambles to the immediate vicinity’.¹²

But almost every Sunday he visited Montmirail. He wrote, ‘I scarcely ever omitted taking it [the road from Neuchâtel to Montmirail] as my Sunday afternoon’s journey, after attending the morning service in the High Church’.¹³ The Collégiale Church of Neuchâtel is a ‘large and handsome edifice apparently built at various times’ whose ‘nave is the Gothic of the fourteenth century’.¹⁴ We spent quite some time inside the church, admiring the magnificent interior and the monument to the counts and countesses of Neuchâtel, which dates from 1372. The beautifully kept cloisters provide a peaceful retreat from the busy town below. From its high location, next to the Castle on the hill above Neuchâtel, it provides a birds-eye view of the town below it. This is the ‘High Church’, but, as La Trobe writes, ‘Besides the church just mentioned, there is a second in the lower part of the town termed L’Eglise en-Bas; a spacious, but ungainly building, with no pretensions to style, or architectural beauty or proportion’.¹⁵ Jason took us to this church and we went inside; it is now a theatre.

At Montmirail was the ‘church of the United Brethren (or Moravians), who have here a large and flourishing establishment for the education of females’.¹⁶ La Trobe not only walked there every Sunday, but also stayed a number of times.¹⁷ It appears he kept in touch with the friends he made there, as in February 1850 he wrote to Agnes: ‘When you see my dear friends at Montmirail give my love to them’.¹⁸ Montmirail is today a guesthouse/hotel under the umbrella of the Don Camillo community, a Christian outreach group; the dormitories for the school-girls of La Trobe’s time have been converted to comfortable hotel rooms.

Daryl Ross suggests that La Trobe’s routine during his years in Switzerland would be ‘to explore the hills and dales, towns and villages of the Swiss countryside during the spring, summer and autumn of 1825, with nothing more than a backpack and a walking stick, his alpenstock. Then, he would return in October

to spend the winter in Neuchâtel and continue his studies’.¹⁹ So in June 1825, as the winter cleared, he ‘quitted a neighbourhood to which I had become much and deservedly attached’ to explore the ‘Alpine districts of Switzerland’.²⁰ This journey is described in Chapters 1 to 5 in *The Alpenstock*, published in 1829.

Perhaps it was through his friends at Montmirail that he received an introduction to the parsonage at Erlenbach, ‘the inhabitants of which the name of a common friend had been my introduction’.²¹ He describes the day of his first visit there on 25 June 1825, ‘standing at the door of the parsonage’ which ‘became, from that very day, a central point from which I started for my summer rambles to every part of the country, and the home to which I always turned my steps when my object was gained or when disappointment or indisposition made my solitude wearisome’.²² Pastor Samuel Studer and his family immediately took to the young traveller, and embraced him as part of their family. La Trobe wrote that he would never ‘out of my own country and immediate circle of relatives, find more disinterestedly affectionate hearts’.²³ The current pastor, Pfarrerin Helma Wever, gave us a very warm welcome and showed us through the parsonage, and the nearby church. We were there on 9 June: the same season as La Trobe’s first visit in 1825.

In *The Alpenstock* La Trobe describes features nearby which can still be seen today: ‘The immediate vicinity is occupied by a flower garden, stocked with many a shrub and flower, created to bloom under a far different sun and sky. The white walls of the house, and the pillars supporting the little side galleries at the gable, were covered with a profusion of vines and the thick foliage of the Virginian Creeper. Behind, a wild mountain torrent, descending from the mountains to the N. dashed down a rocky and shady gully, in the side of the hill’.²⁴ The white walls of the parsonage remain today, but no longer covered in vines; the gully behind the parsonage now has houses, but we can imagine that mountain torrent in La Trobe’s day.

A particular feature is the covered staircase leading to the church and parsonage from the village.²⁵ La Trobe alludes to this as he set out one day ‘descending the long flight of covered steps, which forms an inclined bridge from the knoll on which the church stands, over the gully of the Wildebach to the village’.²⁶ We walked up this covered stairway, still maintained and in use today, from the village to the parsonage.

Only two days after he arrived at the parsonage, La Trobe and Pastor Studer climbed the Stockhorn, a tall mountain in the Alps west



Jakob Samuel Weibel, 1771–1846, artist
Erlenbach, 1822
 Aquatint
 Schweizerische Nationalbibliothek
 View of the parish church and parsonage



Jason Grant, photographer
 Covered walkway of the parish church, 2023



John Botham,
 photographer
 The parsonage,
 Erlenbach, 2023

of the town. The summit is accessed now by cable car, but La Trobe writes 'my host and myself took our Alp-poles &c and set off'²⁷ from the parsonage on the afternoon of 27 June 1825, and reached the summit towards the end of that day. Having spent an hour and a half at the summit, 'waiting in vain for a final dispersion of the vapours', they began their descent, took some refreshment at a chalet at dusk, only to descend further to their 'night quarters'.²⁸ We were fortunate to have sunny skies for our trip up the Stockhorn, although as we descended, the clouds were gathering and if we had delayed our descent, we would have been enveloped in the 'vapours'.

La Trobe writes: 'Alpine plants clothe the little patches of soil amongst the rocks of the Stockhorn to the highest crag'.²⁹ La Trobe and Studer collected many specimens on this hike: 'our tin-cases began to fill rapidly with specimens of Alpine botany'.³⁰ He advises his readers that 'For a tolerably complete list of the Flora of the Stockhorn and the neighbouring ranges, see Appendix 1'.³¹ We had the list with us as we climbed the last leg of the trip to the summit and Jason identified thirty-six of the plants on this list in just a half-hour session.

This was the first of many excursions La Trobe undertook with Pastor Studer between 1825 and 1835, and La Trobe visited the Erlenbach parsonage on his first visit to Switzerland immediately after his return from Port Phillip in 1854 when he sketched the Stockhorn.

At the end of October 1825, La Trobe paused his travels and 'settled seriously and quietly down in my old winter quarters and to my winter occupations at Neuchâtel',³² where he wrote: 'Nothing could exceed the general quiet and tranquillity of this little town during the winter months'.³³

Then, 'as in the foregoing year, the middle of June (1826) found me shaking off my scruples, my winter habits and occupations, my comparatively sedentary existence, and, I may add, many enjoyments; ...with my knapsack and pole, and with my face turned towards the Alps'.³⁴ Another summer season of travels, 1826, is described in Chapters 7 to 10 in *The Alpenstock*. And then he writes in March 1827: 'The task that I have prescribed for myself is at an end'. And 'the thaw commenced early in March... was the signal for my departure from a country, which... had long ceased to be a foreign land to me'.³⁵

La Trobe returned to England in March 1827; he worked towards the publication of

The Alpenstock, hoped to secure a position with the Colonial Government, and he cared for a short time for his ailing father. But, with *The Alpenstock* published, his father recovered and no prospect of a job,³⁶ he returned to Switzerland in the autumn of 1829.³⁷ He spent the winter in his usual quarters in Neuchâtel, and then embarked in May 1830 on a tour of the Tyrol, described in *The Pedestrian*, returning to Erlenbach in August 1830. By May the following year, 1831, he had met Count Frédéric de Pourtalès and his wife Countess Marie-Louise, née Marie Louise Elisabeth de Castellane-Norante.³⁸ This couple were to have a huge impact on his life for the next few years and were to become constant friends to him and to his family for decades to come. In fact, he later wrote to Agnes, 'I owe all, humanly speaking, under Gods good providence, to these dear friends'.³⁹

Daryl Ross records that the Pourtalès family was one of several in Neuchâtel who were 'wealthy and ennobled families with not only impressive town mansions in Neuchâtel itself but with commercial, banking and property interests throughout Europe and abroad'.⁴⁰ In 1831, they owned two houses in Neuchâtel, a castle in Greng and a farming estate, *Jolimont*.

When La Trobe first met them, they were living with their two sons, Albert and Guillaume, at Faubourg de l'Hôpital 24, a little further along the road from La Trobe's lodgings. This is the house where Albert, later to accompany La Trobe on travels in England, North America and Mexico, grew up. It has a fairly plain aspect from the street, but its back view looks out over a formal garden that would have extended, during La Trobe's time, down to the lake shore. The level of the lake has subsequently been lowered providing reclaimed land for more streets and buildings between the Pourtalès house and the lake.

The Villa Castellane at Faubourg de l'Hôpital 21, diagonally across the street from Number 24, was built by Frédéric and Marie-Louise between 1814 and 1816. The mansion was a grand house for receiving important guests, entertaining friends and holding functions. Today, it is home to the Villa Castellane Association, an alliance of several Neuchâtel entrepreneurs who seek to encourage and promote an appreciation of the city's cultural heritage.⁴¹

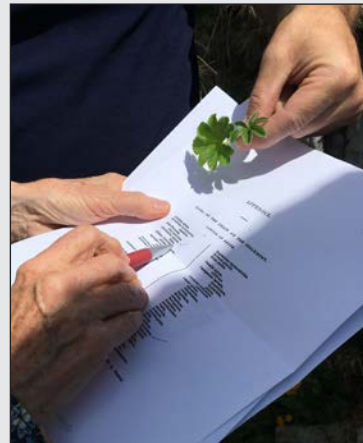
Albert's grandfather, Jacques Louis, owned a house at Faubourg de l'Hôpital 8, in which Empress Joséphine (wife of Napoleon) had stayed in 1810.⁴² This was during the time that Frédéric, his son (Albert's father), was equerry to the Empress Joséphine, and the year



John Botham, photographer
From the cable car to the
summit of the Stockhorn, 2023



Charles Joseph La Trobe, 1801-1875, artist
The Stockhorn from above Erlenbach,
Aug. 1854
Pen and pencil on paper
National Trust of Australia (Victoria),
LTC 353
Deposited on long-term loan in the
Pictures Collection, State Library Victoria



Identifying a plant from La Trobe's
'Flora of the Chain of the Stockhorn',
The Alpenstock, p.[385]

John Botham, photographer
Jason Grant and Helen Botham
on the Stockhorn, 2023



Unknown photographer
Château Greng, 2023
Source: <https://www.homegate.ch>

before he married Marie Louise who was maid-of-honour to the Empress. Jacques Louis died in 1814, but his other two sons, Louis and James, may have been living there when La Trobe was in Neuchâtel and, as with No. 24, a formal garden would have extended down to the lake. This building is now occupied by a bank.

The Pourtalès country estate at Greng was situated on the southern shore of Lake Murten (Morat in French), a small lake to the east of Lake Neuchâtel. The estate in those days extended to the lake shore. Now the château is at the centre of a pleasant residential development that is cut off from the lake by the main road and it is difficult to get a view of it. Murten (Morat) is a charming walled mediaeval town with the picturesque lanes and alleys of the Old Town overlooked by a castle. La Trobe sketched a view of the surrounding area in 1858, showing *Château de Greng*, Lake Morat and the town of Morat.⁴³

La Trobe's first reported visits to *Greng* were in June 1831 followed by a week's stay in July that year: 'Quitted Neuchâtel finally for Greng in company of the de Montmollin family, Mad de P., Al., [Madame de Pourtalès, Albert] etc., etc. on the morning of Friday 8th July'. Was the decision that Albert should accompany La Trobe on his trip, later that week, to England made during that visit? On 14 July, 'About 10 o'clock my companion [Albert] & myself quitted Greng'.⁴⁴

La Trobe described that week as being 'Spent in very pleasant Society at Greng'.⁴⁵ It could be surmised that it was during this week at *Greng* that La Trobe developed an affection for Sophie de Montmollin. In letters to Mme de Pourtalès during his later travels with Albert, hidden references were made to his relationship with her. Barnes notes that 'Letters from America make no direct reference to his feeling for Sophie, but there are signals she could read'.⁴⁶ In a letter from Baltimore in June 1832, discussing Albert's recent introductions to 'pretty personages' in Baltimore, La Trobe adds: 'According to him I am irrecoverably a lost man'.⁴⁷

Having often mentioned *Greng* in his letters to Mme de Pourtalès while travelling with Albert in 1832-34,⁴⁸ he returned to *Greng* several times in July 1835, while he was in turmoil over his forthcoming proposal of marriage to Sophie. While staying there on 29 July, two days before he was 'approved', he was 'Very ill at my ease & unable to do anything'.⁴⁹ After a visit to Neuchâtel for the proposal and the 'approval' he stayed, with Sophie, 'etc', at *Greng* from 4 to 14 August 1835. It was clearly a home in which they felt comfortable.

With his family, he visited *Greng* on their return from Port Phillip. They had an extended stay in Switzerland from the summer of 1857 until autumn 1858: Agnes recorded that they spent the winter of 1857-58 between *La Rochette* and *Greng*.⁵⁰ In June 1858, his daughter Isabelle

Castellane Helen La Trobe was born at *Greng*. They continued to visit there as a family, and Agnes made several visits in her later years, after her father's death.⁵¹

The Pourtalès family also owned *Jolimont*, a farming estate with a large house near to Lake Bienné. During his fraught travels backwards and forwards in the difficult days leading up to his proposal of marriage to Sophie in 1835, La Trobe visited there many times. They spent the first days of their honeymoon there.⁵² Although it is privately owned, we entered the drive, took photos and chatted to the tenant farmer.

In 1845, Albert de Pourtalès, La Trobe's travelling companion and then lifelong friend, with his father Frédéric, bought a beautiful country estate, *Schloss Oberhofen*, eighty-five kilometres from Neuchâtel. We were given a tour of the house by the curator, Rolf Jordi. It is a spectacular house with beautiful gardens overlooking Lake Thun (see John Botham's article, page 33). Agnes was brought here several times after she returned to Switzerland from Port Phillip in 1845. La Trobe visited with his children only two weeks after he returned to Switzerland in 1854 and subsequently made many return visits with his family. Agnes and her husband, Count Pierre de Salis-Soglio, stayed during the 1870s, 80s and 90s.⁵³ The room they stayed in was being renovated when we visited.⁵⁴ The site is open to the public during the summer months and guided tours are available.

The Pourtalès family had many links with the Montmollin family. Sophie's father, Swiss councillor Frédéric Auguste de Montmollin, and Count Frédéric de Pourtalès were first cousins, their mothers being sisters, which is why Mme de Pourtalès was always referred to in letters from La Trobe to Agnes as 'Aunt Louise'.⁵⁵ Sophie was the eighth of thirteen children; they lived in a large house which still today overlooks the Place des Halles in Neuchâtel. Dianne Reilly says 'After their honeymoon, Sophie's mother made available spacious apartments for the newly-weds in the Montmollin family residence... La Trobe wrote to his sister Charlotte, describing their new home, and commenting that "our dear mother is very anxious that we should be comfortable in her house, and I am sure that we shall be so"'.⁵⁶ Agnes sent a post-card many years later to Rose, daughter of Charles and Sophie's housekeeper Charlotte Pellet, pointing out the room in this building where she was born.⁵⁷ There are now shops and cafes on the ground floor, and offices on the floors above. On the first-floor landing is the de Montmollin Coat of Arms.

The Montmollin family also owned a country estate, *La Borcarderie*, only five kilometres

out of Neuchâtel, but a retreat nevertheless. As well as *Greng* and *Jolimont*, La Trobe visited here many times leading up to his marriage proposal and, following their marriage just prior to their departure on a trip to England, he and Sophie spent the 'week till the 4 October... between the Borcarderie & Neuchâtel... packing and preparing for departure – the three last days of the week family & friends meeting to dine at the former & to say adieu'.⁵⁸ The fact that he sketched it in 1854 would suggest he visited there on his first trip back to Switzerland on his return from Melbourne.

A notable house in Neuchâtel for La Trobe followers is *La Rochette*. Originally built in 1710 and owned by the de Meuron family, Agnes lived here for nine years with her Aunt Rose, her mother's sister, after returning from Port Phillip in 1845.⁵⁹ (Rose's first husband, Louis Auguste de Meuron, had died in 1843 and she continued to live here with her parents-in-law; she married the widowed Charles La Trobe in 1855). Agnes lived there again for a short time, many years later, with her husband, as Rose La Trobe told Rose Amiet (née Pellet) in 1880: 'Mr & Mrs de Salis now live at la Rochette, the house where she lived during nine years with me when she was a little girl'.⁶⁰

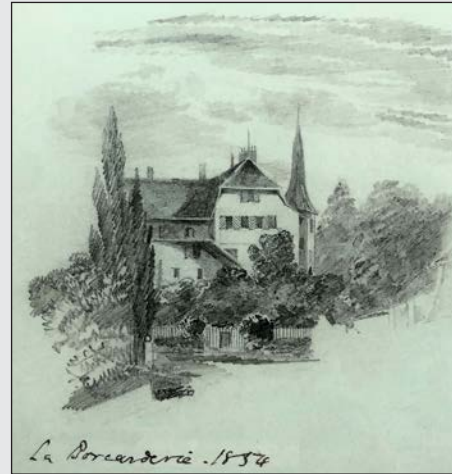
Sophie mentioned *La Rochette* in her letters to Agnes from Port Phillip. She asked Agnes to 'Remember me kindly to all the ladies at La Rochette' in letters from *Jolimont* in January 1849 and December 1850.⁶¹ The large house is on the hill overlooking Neuchâtel. The family must have been distressed when the railway came in 1865; Neuchâtel station now overlooks the house.

A significant La Trobe building in Neuchâtel, yet not there in La Trobe's time, is the *Chapelle de l'Ermitage*.⁶² This English-style chapel was built by Rose La Trobe in 1878 on her return to Neuchâtel following La Trobe's death. She built it in memory of her husband and daughter Isabelle, who died aged sixteen, the year before her father. There are memorials to family members both inside and outside the church, which is now within the Reformed Church of the Canton of Neuchâtel.

The central stained-glass window at the front of the church is the work of an Australian glassmaker, Alan Sumner, who was commissioned by the Government of Victoria to create this memorial window on the occasion of the chapel's 100th anniversary in 1978. Its panels depict episodes of La Trobe's time in Port Phillip. The lower panel shows La Trobe engaging with two Aboriginal people, this scene acknowledging his concern for the welfare of



John Botham, photographer
Jolimont, 2023



Charles Joseph La Trobe, 1801-1875, artist
La Borcarderie, 1854

Pencil on paper
National Trust of Australia (Victoria), LTC 349
Deposited on long-term loan in the Pictures Collection,
State Library Victoria



J. Claude Vuilleumier, photographer
La Rochette, c.2020

Source: <https://www.photos-neuch.net>

the Indigenous peoples. Moving up we see La Trobe the horseman and expeditioner, and possibly the botanist, with, as Bronwyn Hughes suggests, 'stylised foliage under the searing Southern sun'.⁶³ We then see La Trobe as artist and writer, and in the upper panel he is shown in full Governor's uniform with cocked hat in hand. The inscription at the bottom of the window states: 'Presented by the people of Victoria Australia to the parishioners of Chapelle de l'Ermitage in memory of Charles Joseph La Trobe (1801-1875) First Governor: Colony of Victoria'.

La Trobe sent specimens of plants to the Museum in Neuchâtel from America, the West Indies and Port Phillip and animals and birds from Port Phillip. These are recorded in the *Memoires La Société des Sciences Naturelles de Neuchâtel*, dating from 1835.⁶⁴ The plant specimens were transferred to the University in 1918 and the bird and animal specimens moved with the other museum collections to the newly-named Natural History Museum in the 1980s. Jason had arranged with his colleagues at the Natural History Museum for us to view these and we saw, among a large number of animal specimens, a kangaroo, koala, a platypus and a Tasmanian Devil and a large number of birds.



Jason Grant, photographer
Helen and John Botham at the
Neuchâtel Herbarium, 2023



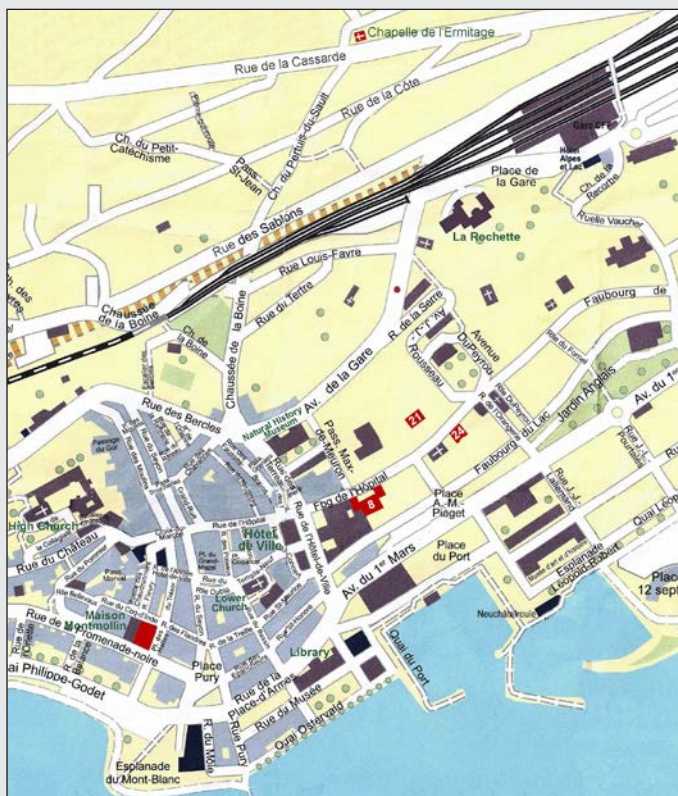
Helen Botham, photographer
Specimen at the Neuchâtel
Natural History Museum, 2023
Label: *Nycticorax caledonicus*
[night heron] Australie Latrobe C-J

La Trobe's botanical specimens are held at the Herbarium at the Institute of Biology of the University within the archive of botanical specimens collected from around the world.⁶⁵ They are catalogued according to their botanical families and we were tasked by Jason to search the folders most likely to hold specimens from Port Phillip: the families Fabaceae, Myrtaceae and Proteaceae. During our afternoon in the herbarium we found forty previously undocumented La Trobe specimens collected by La Trobe and sent to the Museum in Neuchâtel. Jason is hoping to gain funding to support two doctoral students to fully research and document this archive, and we are keen to support him in this endeavour.

It was a wonderful experience for us to spend time in Neuchâtel: its magnificent setting on the lake with the Alps in the background, the charming stories which were revealed as we visited the La Trobe sites and meeting the residents who seemed to us a gentle, happy people content with their lives in this beautiful environment. We left, as La Trobe did in June 1826: '...as I mounted the gentle hills towards Anet, I could not forbear pausing, and casting many a lingering look down upon the country I was quitting. There lay our unruffled and wide-spread lake, and its town and villages sleeping in the morning haze... and as I looked, regret began to steal over my mind'.⁶⁶



Map of Neuchâtel environs



Map of Neuchâtel
Annotated to show places with
La Trobe connections

Acknowledgement

I would like to express our gratitude to Professor Jason Grant for arranging to drive us on our tour and his contribution to its success.

Images

More images may be viewed at
<https://www.latrobesociety.org.au/latrobe-postscript#Switzerland>
 and in a video of the presentation to Cottage volunteers at
<https://www.latrobesociety.org.au/swiss-pilgrimage>

Endnotes

- 1 For details about the significance and history of Montmirail, see Daryl Ross, 'Charles Joseph La Trobe in Neuchâtel: Montmirail to Jolimont', *La Trobeana*, vol.15, no.2, July 2016, pp.22-28.
- 2 John Barnes, *La Trobe: Traveller, Writer, Governor*, Canberra: Halstead Press, in association with State Library Victoria [and] La Trobe University, 2017, pp.54-55.
- 3 Charles Joseph La Trobe, *The Chateau Angenstein, Val de Moutier, October 1824*, Pencil and sepia wash on paper, National Trust of Australia (Victoria), LTC 325, on long-term loan to State Library Victoria.
- 4 Charles Joseph La Trobe, *The Alpenstock: Or, Sketches of Swiss scenery and manners, 1825-1826*, London, R. B. Seeley & W. Burnside, 1829, pp.1-2.
- 5 For a description of Neuchâtel at that time, see Dianne Reilly, 'Neuchâtel in the Nineteenth Century', *La Trobeana*, vol.12, no.2, July 2013, pp.6-19 (see also note 12).
- 6 Barnes, p.55.
- 7 *The Alpenstock*, p.2.
- 8 *Ibid.*, p.2. (The apartment was a little over four by four metres.)
- 9 *Ibid.*, p.166.
- 10 Charles Joseph La Trobe Journal 1829-30. La Trobe Archive, Australian Manuscripts Collection, State Library Victoria, MS 13003, Box 76/2.
- 11 *The Alpenstock*, p.3.
- 12 *Ibid.*, pp.4-5. (These words refute a view that La Trobe went to Neuchâtel to tutor Albert de Pourtalès, see John Barnes, 'Charles La Trobe in Neuchâtel: a research report', *The La Trobe Journal*, No.88, December 2011, pp.92-95.)
- 13 *The Alpenstock*, p.194.
- 14 *Ibid.*, p.165.
- 15 *Ibid.*, p.172.
- 16 *Ibid.*, p.193.
- 17 Barnes (2017), p.55.
- 18 Charles Joseph La Trobe to Agnes February 1850, La Trobe Neuchâtel Archive, Australian Manuscripts Collection, State Library Victoria, MS 13354, Box 3, Folder 28.
- 19 Ross, p.22.
- 20 *The Alpenstock*, p.6.
- 21 *Ibid.*, p.21.
- 22 *Ibid.*, p.22.
- 23 *Ibid.*, p.132.
- 24 *Ibid.*, pp.21-22.
- 25 The parish church (Kirchgemeinde) is now part of the Reformed Church of the Canton of Bern-Jura-Solothurn.
- 26 *The Alpenstock*, p.141.
- 27 *Ibid.*, p.25.
- 28 *Ibid.*, pp.25-28.
- 29 *Ibid.*, p.26.
- 30 *Ibid.*, p.25.
- 31 *Ibid.*, p.28, note. The Appendix may be found at pp.[385]-388.
- 32 *Ibid.*, p.162.
- 33 *Ibid.*, p.166.
- 34 *Ibid.*, p.212.
- 35 *Ibid.*, p.383.
- 36 Barnes (2017), pp.57, 60.
- 37 Charles Joseph La Trobe, *The Pedestrian: a summer's ramble in the Tyrol and some of the adjacent provinces, 1830*, London: R. B. Seeley & W. Burnside, 1832, p.1.
- 38 Although La Trobe always refers to M. and Mme de Pourtalès, they were in fact Comte and Comtesse de Pourtalès.
- 39 La Trobe to Agnes La Trobe, 9 October 1861. SLV, MS 13354, Box 3, Folder 26.
- 40 Ross, p.25.
- 41 <https://ch.kompass.com/fr/c/association-villa-castellane/chb22227> (accessed 28 December 2023).
- 42 Plaque on the rear fence wall of the house on Faubourg du Lac: 'Ici séjournèrent, en 1810, l'impératrice Joséphine'.
- 43 Charles Joseph La Trobe, *Morat & its Lake*, 1858, Pencil and sepia wash on paper, National Trust of Australia (Victoria), LTC 370, on long-term loan to State Library Victoria.
- 44 Charles Joseph La Trobe Supplementary notices and memoranda, p.356. SLV, MS 13003, Box 76/2. Safe 3.
- 45 *Ibid.*
- 46 Barnes (2017), p.118.
- 47 La Trobe to Comtesse Louise de Pourtalès, Baltimore, 6 June 1832, SLV, MS 13354, Box 5, Folder 44.



Mathias Gabriel Lory, 1784-1846, artist
Vue de la Ville de Neuchâtel, en Suisse, 1817

Watercolour and pencil
 Schweizerische Nationalbibliothek
 La Trobe arrived by this road in 1824 past 'the vineyard, lately
 the scene of so much life and gaiety', *The Alpenstock*, p.162

- 48 From the Arkansas River in December 1832, La Trobe wrote to Countess de Pourtalès: 'the seeds that I have gathered in these distant regions I shall... send to you without delay & hope that one day I may be favoured to see... the flowers of the Prairie flourishing in your garden at Greng', Letter No.6. Steamboat Reindeer, December 1832, SLV, MS 13354, Box 5, Folder 44.
- 49 Charles Joseph La Trobe, 29 July 1835, Private Memoranda, SLV, MS 13354, Box 4, Folder 31.
- 50 Journal of Agnes La Trobe de Salis, 1837-1914. SLV, MS 13354, Box 4, Folder 38.
- 51 Ibid.
- 52 La Trobe Private Memoranda, 16 September 1835. SLV, MS 13354, Box 4, Folder 31.
- 53 Journal of Agnes La Trobe de Salis.
- 54 Personal communication Rolf Jordi to Helen Botham, 9 June 2023.
- 55 Personal communication: M. Georges de Montmollin to John Botham, 31 August 2023.
- 56 Dianne Reilly, 'An Anglo-Swiss Alliance: the marriage of Charles Joseph La Trobe and Sophie de Montmollin of Neuchâtel', *La Trobeana*, vol.12, no.2, July 2013, p.22.
- 57 Ross, p.27. For picture, see <https://www.latrobesociety.org.au/latrobe-postscript#Switzerland>.
- 58 Charles Joseph La Trobe, Private Memoranda, 27 September 1835, SLV, MS 13354, Box 4, Folder 31.
- 59 Journal of Agnes La Trobe de Salis.
- 60 Rose La Trobe to Rose Amiet, from L'Hermitage, Neuchâtel 4 September 1880, SLV, MS 7614, Box 4075/2.
- 61 Sophie La Trobe to Agnes, 1 January 1849 Jolimont Melbourne, SLV, MS 13354, Box 3 Folder 27; 15 December 1850, Folder 28.
- 62 Daryl Ross, 'La Chapelle de l'Ermitage, Neuchâtel', *La Trobeana*, vol.15, no.1, March 2016, pp.20-27.
- 63 Ibid., p.23, Bronwyn Hughes, 'The Governor's Window', *La Trobeana*, vol.12, no.2, July 2013, p.11-18. For picture, see <https://www.latrobesociety.org.au/latrobe-postscript#Switzerland>.
- 64 'M. le comte Albert de Pourtalès et M. Latrobe, un envoi considérable d'insecte récolté dans l'Amérique du Nord et au Mexique'. *Mémoires de la Société des sciences naturelles de Neuchâtel*, 1835, p.32, <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/40297#page/40/mode/1up> (accessed 1 January 2024. The former Museum building is now the Library).
- 65 See Helen Botham, 'C J La Trobe: Jolimont Plantsman', *La Trobeana*, vol.21, no.1, March 2022; Botanical specimens collected by La Trobe, <https://www.latrobesociety.org.au/specimens> (accessed 1 January 2024).
- 66 *The Alpenstock*, p.214.

Schloss Oberhofen: where the La Trobes were always much loved guests

By John Botham

John Botham is a committee member and webmaster of the La Trobe Society. He spent a career in the RAF and with the Civil Aviation Safety Authority before developing an interest in early Victorian history. He has worked tirelessly to develop an understanding amongst government and the public of the heritage importance of the La Trobe's Cottage, and is currently the Chair of the Friends of La Trobe's Cottage. In 2023 John visited Schloss Oberhofen in the Canton of Bern, Switzerland.

In the *Schloss Oberhofen* guest book entry for 23 August 1854, Charles Joseph La Trobe wrote that he was

... grateful for the welcome which we have rec.d at Oberhofen, and to admire the wonderful changes which have been effected in & about the old rumble-tumble tower & higgletpigglety chateau, since I last saw them 18 or 20 years ago. These changes are worthy in every respect of the heads & the hands which have since [been] occupied with them.¹

He had arrived that day at the château with his children, Agnes, Eleanora, Cecilia and Charles Albert, and their governess Mlle Béguin.

After departing Melbourne on 5 May 1854 and arriving in England via Panama on 17 July, he spent three weeks in London reporting to the Colonial Office before travelling to Neuchâtel in Switzerland to reacquaint himself with his children, relatives and friends there. After the death of his wife Sophie in January, the children continued to be looked after by Mlle Béguin and Sophie's sister Rose de Meuron. A week later he headed south to Erlenbach via *Château de Greng*, a residence of the Pourtalès family in the Canton of Fribourg beside Lake Morat (Murten). He introduced his children to his botanist friend Pastor Samuel Studer and the magnificent scenery of the Simmental before completing his excursion on the other side of Lake Thun at *Schloss Oberhofen* (map p.25). He was greeted by his friend Count Albert de Pourtalès and Countess Anna.²



William Brockedon, 1787-1854, artist
Charles Joseph La Trobe, 1835
 Black, red and brown chalk on paper
 National Portrait Gallery, London



Franz Krüger, 1797-1857, artist
Count Albert Alexandre de Pourtalès, 1836
 Detail from family portrait, pastel
 Private collection

La Trobe and the Pourtalès family

La Trobe first met Count Albert Alexandre de Pourtalès in July 1831 during his second extended stay in Neuchâtel from his home in England.³ He had made contact with some of the city's leading families during his time there, and in early May 1831 he visited Lake Geneva with Count Frédéric and Countess Louise de Pourtalès: he was with them at St Gingolph on 9 May, and then travelled to Villeneuve with Countess Louise on 10 May.⁴ He visited them again on 5 June at *Château de Greng*.⁵ Subsequent events suggest that they discussed their elder son, Albert. The Count and Countess were concerned about the company he was keeping at his university in Geneva and that he had started to show democratic tendencies. Albert was keen to travel, so his parents saw an opportunity to engage an experienced traveller with conservative opinions. In July, Albert accompanied La Trobe on a tour of England for four and a half months, and in March 1832 they met again in Paris and departed for North America and Mexico for over two years. The strategy worked. La Trobe wrote to Countess Louise from St Louis, Missouri, 'Albert is quite cured of his democratic fancies, & promises to become a legitimiste & aristocrat of the first water'.⁶

Count and Countess de Pourtalès put considerable trust in La Trobe. Not only were they giving money to La Trobe to pay for the expenses and probably something for his service, but they entrusted La Trobe with the welfare of

their son, even extending to providing him with a paper authorising him to act on their behalf. Fortunately, La Trobe was able to navigate the many issues that occurred during their travels without having to reveal his authority. Although Albert must have suspected such an arrangement, the matter was never raised and the close relationship between the pair prevented any conflict.⁷

From La Trobe's letters to Countess Louise after arriving back from America, it is clear that the Countess had sought La Trobe's views and advice on Albert's future. La Trobe wrote: 'I should never doubt Albert's distinguishing himself in whatever career he embraced' and 'my opinion is in favour of his taking the preliminary steps for actual service as secretary, if he can make up his mind to do so; but that I should greatly regret hearing that he had left you, as simple attaché to any embassy whatever, for a year or two to come'.⁸ La Trobe and the Countess maintained a close relationship, writing often and La Trobe was a frequent house guest when in Switzerland.

La Trobe and Albert developed a deep friendship during their travels together. Early in their time in America, La Trobe reported to Countess Louise:

It will gratify you to hear what I can say with truth, that Albert since we're this time left to each other's more intimate acquaintance has gained greatly

upon me also, & I feel my affection for my companion growing daily. I believe we understand one another much better than heretofore, & I am led to anticipate not only an absence of difficulty in conducting our present relations together & a pleasant period of wanderings – but the gradual growth of a friendship which may last during our lives.⁹

That proved to be the case; after their travels La Trobe and Albert corresponded and met at every opportunity. Albert was present when La Trobe married Sophie de Montmollin at Bern on 16 September 1835. As well as Sophie's parents, Count Frédéric and Countess Louise were also in the bridal party.¹⁰ It was probably during La Trobe and Sophie's honeymoon that La Trobe saw 'the old rumble-tumble tower & higgletypigglety chateau' at Oberhofen that he referred to in the Guest Book in 1854. In 1855, Albert wrote to La Trobe from Venice where he was acquiring items to adorn *Oberhofen*, 'of all things, we wish to see you there and I think that, after all, no object of art, no statue of Praxiteles and no portrait of Titian are equal to an old friend's "horrid" phys'.¹¹

The Pourtalès family were very wealthy. Albert's grandfather, Jacques Louis, built a massive fortune from importing fabrics and exporting printed cloth to all the major cities of Europe, and for a time was considered the wealthiest man in Europe.¹² Albert's father, Frédéric, owned *Château de Greng* as well as large town houses at 21 and 24 Faubourg de l'Hôpital in Neuchâtel. They also purchased a more modest country house on the Jolimont hill located high above Lake Bienne, offering a wonderful view, now blocked by tree growth. They planned to expand it into a residence for a large family, and it was also a working farm.¹³

Schloss Oberhofen

Albert, however, was looking for a property to call his own, one with views of the mountains. When he saw *Schloss Oberhofen* with its medieval charm, he was enchanted by the property on the picturesque Lake Thun. It became available in 1844 and Albert and his father acquired it. Albert had just completed six years in the Prussian embassy in Constantinople as second and then first Secretary and was appointed to the Bülow Ministry in Berlin. The château was in a rundown state and Albert's parents took over the task of managing the conversion and extension work for Albert at their own expense.¹⁴ The main tower was remodelled with new floors and windows and the top floor was converted into an Oriental smoking room (picture p.33); Albert



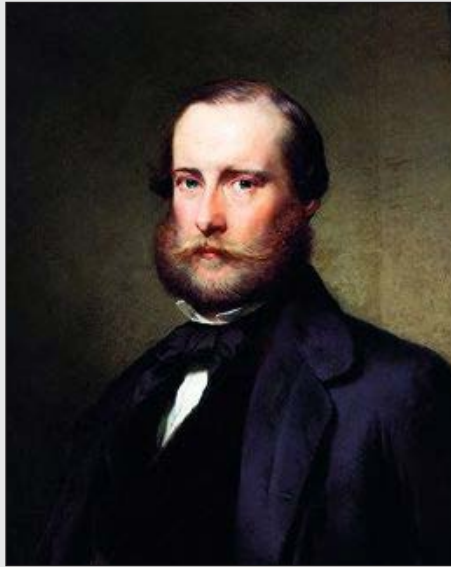
Unknown artist
Countess Marie Louise
Elisabeth de Pourtalès (detail)
Oil on canvas
Private collection

brought carpets, tables, chairs, etc. from Turkey to install in the smoking room and the wood carvings were made by Swiss craftsmen based on Ottoman models.¹⁵ The distinctive tower out in the water was not added until later in the century. It was used as a second men's smoking room to avoid the climb to the top floor.¹⁶

The castle at Oberhofen was likely built as a fortress in the early thirteenth century. In the fourteenth century it was sold to the Hapsburgs, then an important family ruling much of Austria and parts of Switzerland. In 1386, the Swiss Confederacy rose up against the Austrian rulers, and after they defeated them at the Battle of Sempach, Bernese troops occupied *Oberhofen*. In 1398, the castle was sold to Ludwig von Seftigen, a citizen of Bern. It was passed through several Bernese families and during this time was developed into a residence. In the seventeenth century, it was acquired by the City of Bern and became the administrative centre for the area. In 1803 it passed into private hands again and had several owners before being acquired by the Pourtalès family in 1844.¹⁷

Count Albert de Pourtalès and family

Albert met Anna von Bethmann-Hollweg, the daughter of Moritz August von Bethmann-Hollweg, a professor at Bonn University, who later became the Royal Prussian Minister of Education and Minister of Spiritual Science. At various court festivals, Fräulein von Bethmann-Hollweg had impressed Albert Alexandre with her noble demeanour. They



Unknown artist
Count Albert Alexander de
Pourtalès, c.1846? (detail)
Oil on canvas
Private collection



Carl Joseph Begas, 1794–1854, artist
Countess Anna de Pourtalès, 1846 (detail)
Oil on canvas
Private collection

married on 6 August 1846 and the following year on 4 September, their first daughter, Elisabeth, was born. They had a second daughter, Helene Constance Josephine Mathilde Wilhelmine, on 7 May 1849.¹⁸ Helene was christened in the chapel of the Prussian embassy in Constantinople on 17 June 1849 and La Trobe was given the honour of being her godfather.¹⁹

Schloss Oberhofen quickly became dear to Albert and his family and was eventually used as a residence for several weeks every year. Count Frédéric and Countess Louise spent most of the year at *Grenz* or in their house in Neuchâtel, but also at *Oberhofen*, in Venice or elsewhere. Count Albert and Countess Anna lived with their daughters in the respective embassy palaces in Constantinople, Paris, Venice, Berlin and of course at *Oberhofen*.²⁰ The property is in a wonderful location with an incomparable view of the Bernese Alps and was considered an oasis of calm and originality for the Pourtalès family.²¹

The La Trobes and Schloss Oberhofen

La Trobe's daughter Agnes had returned from Melbourne to Neuchâtel in 1845 to stay under the care of her grandmother, Madame Frédéric Auguste de Montmollin (née Rose Augustine de Meuron) and her aunt, Rose de Meuron, with whom she lived at *La Rochette*,²² and to complete her schooling there. She visited *Oberhofen* for the first time in 1848 and was a regular visitor there for most of the rest of her life.

During his visit from 23 to 26 August 1854, La Trobe wrote long entries in the *Oberhofen* guest book. He kept losing himself in the rambling château:

I have done [so] two or three times already since we entered the gateway, in entering seeking my own apartment or that of my offspring. I am conscious that I have insinuated my head into more than one aperture in the thick walls, in [which] it had no possible business, have alarmed more than one servant maid, disturbed more than one inmate; and beyond the assurance that I was really & truly some where within the walls of the Château d'Oberhofen, had no more idea of my precise longitude & latitude, than the man in the moon.²³

On 24 August Albert accompanied La Trobe and party to the steamer to Interlaken. They admired the view of 'the Niesen... the Stockhorn & its chain, all in great beauty', and observed 'Interlachen as full as it could hold – foreigners of all nations crowding the Hotels & walking about with alpenstocks in hand, & bottles, portfolios, bags & knapsacks hanging on their persons'. They walked across the town to Goldswil: 'Enchanting views on every side. I am fully persuaded that there is no mountain scenery in the world to be compared to this – or possessing so many of the elements of picturesque beauty. We return by the 4 o'clock boat'.²⁴

During the following summers La Trobe was a regular visitor. In 1857 he drew seven sketches of *Oberhofen*, including the watercolour pictured opposite. The following year he drew another five.

La Trobe was a regular presence in Albert's daughter Helene's childhood. Around 1923, she wrote about La Trobe in her memoirs:

Charles Joseph La Trobe, my godfather, an Englishman, had come to Neuchâtel, I don't know for what reason, and had made friends with several of our relatives there. When my father undertook a major journey in 1833-35, this older friend accompanied him. They travelled to North America, Louisiana, Texas, and Mexico together, and it is a testament to the tact and kindness of both, and especially the elder, that this mentoring relationship only deepened and cemented the friendship for life. La Trobe had a very endearing personality, full of warmth, natural cheerfulness and a delicious sense of humour. A pronounced sense for nature, undertakings and travel of all kinds, but also an artistic conception was characteristic of him, and he was a very lively, fresh person; he was very tall, had a distinctly ugly face, but it was so lovable and lively and expressive that one always liked to look at it. He was also very musical; his father... had already taken an active interest in early church music, had sought out a great deal of the old and combined it into a sizeable and recognized collection. Very well trained, La Trobe was prepared for all physical exertions, and also had a pretty talent for drawing, so that he was able to capture and reproduce the impressions of the trips. His children later gave me the album with the drawings he made during the American trip.

After his return in 1835, La Trobe married a Pourtalès relative, Sophie de Montmollin,²⁵ in Neuchâtel, and moved with her to Australia, where he resided in Melbourne for many years as English governor. After the death of his wife, La Trobe later married his widowed sister-in-law, Mme Rose de Meuron, née Montmollin, with whom Agnes (the eldest daughter from his first marriage) was brought up. At times he lived with his family in England, but also often in Switzerland, and then they were always very welcome and much loved guests who belonged completely to us and remained very loyal to us in the following generation.²⁶

The Pourtalès Family and Schloss Oberhofen

In 1859, Albert became Prussian Ambassador in Paris. He died unexpectedly of a heart attack on 18 December 1861 at the Embassy in Paris. The next day, La Trobe received the news by telegraphic despatch and set off for Paris on the following day, arriving in time to attend the funeral on 21 December. The family back in England bought and made mourning clothes for another Albert. Prince Albert had died four days before Count Albert and mourning was required for six weeks.²⁷

Countess Anna and her two daughters moved to Berlin after the death of Albert, whose body was moved to *Rheineck*, near Bonn, in the spring of 1862. Her eldest daughter died in 1866 and she regularly journeyed with Countess Helene between Berlin, *Rheineck* and *Oberhofen*. Increasingly, the two arrived at Lake Thun with 'Grand-Maman' and stayed for extended periods.²⁸

Countess Anna was known as a generous benefactor in Oberhofen. According to her husband's wishes, she had the hospital built in 1862/63 with an attached school for small children. The poor from Oberhofen and

Hilterfingen were treated there free of charge. As early as 1859, Count Pourtalès had sent two girls from Oberhofen to the Fliedner Deaconess Institute in Kaiserswerth for training, and rented rooms in the village where the hospital and classroom were initially set up. In 1864, Countess Anna was very distressed by the village fire in Oberhofen, in which the château was spared. Together with Countess Louise, who donated 500 francs, Anna helped the community with an additional 6,000 francs. The school celebrated Christmas in the château every year.²⁹

In 1867, Countess Helene and Count Ferdinand Harrach became engaged and the wedding was set for 26 August 1868 in Oberhofen. In describing the guests later, Helene included 'my dear godfather La Trobe, who was already blind by then, with his wife and daughter Agnes who was one of my bridesmaids'. Agnes joined five of Helene's cousins as bridesmaid and Helene requested them to be dressed in white on pink. Helene would be in a simple white satin dress, closed up to the neck with plain, smooth sleeves and a shawl made of Brussels lace as a veil.³⁰

The wedding day was announced at 5am by gunfire, and the village and château, dressed up for the special occasion, were bathed in



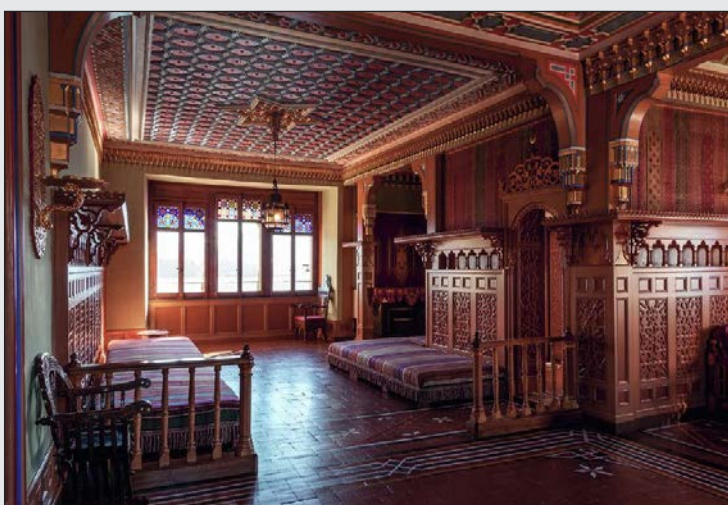
**Charles Joseph La Trobe,
1801-1875, artist
Château Oberhofen, 1857 (detail)**

Watercolour on paper
National Trust of Australia
(Victoria), LTC 359
Deposited on long-term loan in the
Pictures Collection,
State Library Victoria



**Unknown photographer
Salon de Pourtalès (c.1850)**

With portrait of Countess Anna
de Pourtalès
From *Adeliges Leben am Thunersee*
(Noble Life on Lake Thun, 2021),
p.26



**Tom Kummer
photographer
Oriental smoking
room, c.2021**
Designed by architect
Theodor Zeerleder
From *Adeliges Leben am
Thunersee* (Noble Life
on Lake Thun, 2021), p.7

beautiful sunshine. At noon, a train of carriages moved the wedding party from the château to the church, with the bridegroom and his parents and then the bride with her mother bringing up the rear. They passed by arches and paths lined with flags and manned by the townsfolk in great droves to the simple church for the ceremony. On return to the château, thirty-six guests were seated in the dining room at 2pm for a multi-course dinner. Finally, at 6pm the house guests escorted the newly-married couple through the village streets where the villagers, having just completed their feast day, crowded round them at the steamboat landing site. Music rang out and the village choir sang as the couple boarded for Interlaken.³¹

After his return to England, La Trobe wrote to Agnes: 'I cannot tell you and our dear friends in Switzerland what a cheering and cheerful impression I retain of our late visit to Switzerland. It seems to me impossible that I had not seen with my bodily eyes'.³²

The newlyweds accompanied Countess Anna to the island of Norderney off the Prussian North Sea coast in the summer of 1869, where they met Prince Friedrich Wilhelm, later German Emperor Friedrich III, and his wife Victoria, daughter of Queen Victoria. The Harrachs had eight children and they often came to visit Anna at *Oberhofen*, where she enjoyed the happy company of her grandchildren.³³ Helene spent a few weeks almost every year with her husband and the children in *Oberhofen*, the family always saying goodbye sadly to the château and the village with their good friends when it was time to depart.³⁴

Schloss Oberhofen remained in the family until 1925. In 1940 the Schloss Oberhofen Foundation was formed to administer and



Friedrich Kaulbach, 1822-1903, artist
Countess Helene Harrach (detail)
 Oil on canvas
 Private collection

maintain the property. From 1952 to 2009 it was part of the Historical Museum of Bern. *Schloss Oberhofen* is a listed building, and a museum has been set up inside. The current exhibition illuminates the life of the Count's family and the servants from the nineteenth to the beginning of the twentieth century. The building is located in a large park, which is one of the most beautiful gardens in the Alpine region. *Schloss Oberhofen* is open to the public from May to October; information can be found at their web site, www.schlossoberhofen.

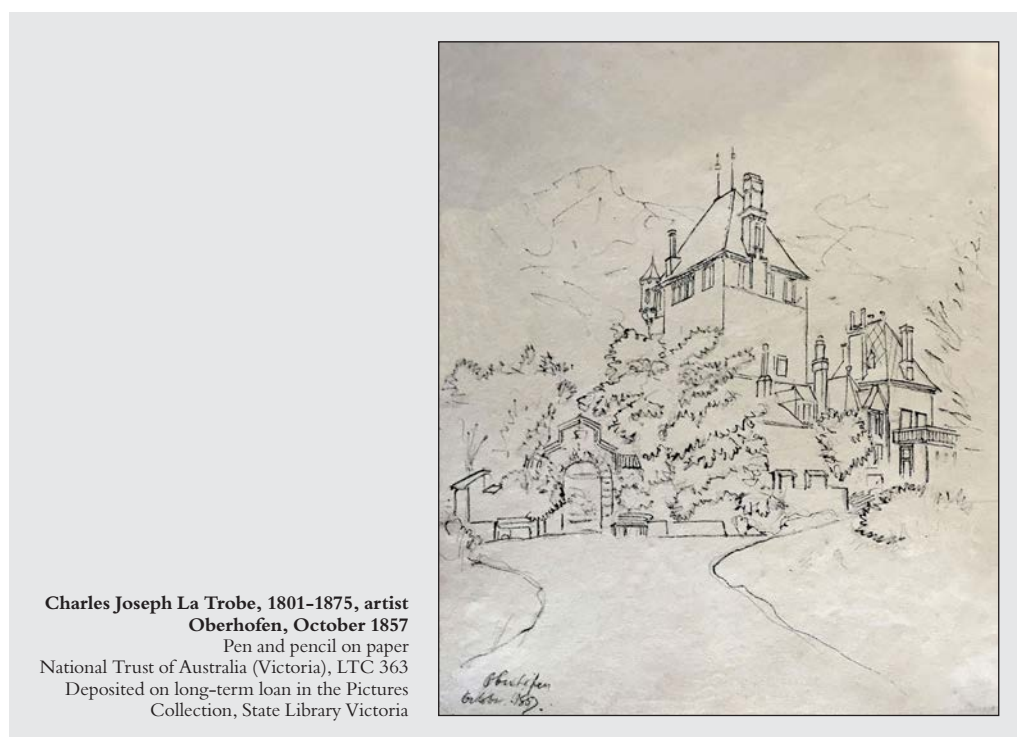
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Endnotes

For further images of places mentioned in this article, see pages 18-23.

- 1 *Schloss Oberhofen* guest books of the Count de Pourtalès and Harrach families, 23 August 1854. Private collection. There are photographs of the pages at *Oberhofen*.
- 2 La Trobe to Agnes, 17 July 1854, La Trobe Neuchâtel Archive, Australian Manuscripts Collection, State Library Victoria, MS 13354, Box 3, Folder 25. *Oberhofen* guest books, 23 August 1854.
- 3 La Trobe to Countess Louise de Pourtalès, 30 June 1832, La Trobe Neuchâtel Archive, SLV, MS 13354, Box 5, Folder 44.
- 4 C J La Trobe Supplementary notices and memoranda, La Trobe Neuchâtel Archive, SLV, MS 13003, Box 76/2, Safe 3, p.355.
- 5 Ibid, p.356. A picture of *Château de Greng* may be seen on p.21.
- 6 La Trobe to Countess Louise de Pourtalès, 30 November 1833, La Trobe Neuchâtel Archive, SLV, MS 13354, Box 5, Folder 44.
- 7 Ibid., 8 August 1834, Folder 43.
- 8 Ibid., 23 September 1834.
- 9 Ibid., 6 June 1832, Folder 44.
- 10 C J La Trobe Private Memoranda, 12 September 1835, La Trobe Neuchâtel Archive, SLV, MS 13354, Box 4, Folder 31.
- 11 Count Albert de Pourtalès to La Trobe, 1 May 1855, La Trobe Neuchâtel Archive, SLV, MS 13354, Box 4, Folder 33.

- 12 Rolf Jordi, *Schloss Oberhofen: die Wiederentdeckung eines Stückes Geschichte* (the rediscovery of a piece of history), Thun, 2004, pp.27–28. (Translated extract accessible at <https://www.latrobesociety.org.au/documents/Pourtalès.pdf>.)
- 13 Ibid., p.25. A picture of *Jolimont* may be seen on p.23.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 Personal communication Rolf Jordi to John Botham, 19 February 2024.
- 16 http://www.swisscastles.ch/Bern/oberhofen_d.html (accessed 16 August 2023). Personal communication Rolf Jordi.
- 17 <https://www.schlossoberhofen.ch/en/schloss/geschichte> (accessed 13 July 2023).
- 18 Jordi, p.30.
- 19 Personal communication Rolf Jordi to John Botham, 9 June 2023; Countess Helene Harrach, Jordi, p.99.
- 20 Jordi, pp.25–26.
- 21 Ibid., p.27.
- 22 'I went to live in La Rochette with Aunt Rose, who lived there with in-laws', La Trobe Neuchâtel Archive, State Library Victoria, MS 13354, Box 4, Folder 38. *La Rochette* was the de Meuron family home, picture p.23.
- 23 Guest books, 23 August 1854.
- 24 Ibid., 24 August 1854.
- 25 Sophie and Albert were second cousins: their paternal grandmothers were sisters from the de Luze family.
- 26 Countess Helene Harrach, translation of quotation in Jordi, pp.99–100. (The American album of drawings, now in the ownership of the National Trust of Victoria, is deposited on loan-term loan in the Pictures Collection, State Library Victoria.)
- 27 Cecile, Agnes and Lily La Trobe journal, 17 September 1860 to 19 February 1862, La Trobe Neuchâtel Archive, SLV, MS 13354, Box 1, Folder 3.
- 28 Jordi, p.36.
- 29 Ibid.
- 30 Rose La Trobe to Agnes, 5 August 1868, La Trobe Neuchâtel Archive, SLV, MS 13354, Box 3, Folder 21; Jordi, p.178.
- 31 Christina Fankhauser, Rolf Jordi, 'Adeliges Leben am Thunersee' (Noble Life on Lake Thun), 2021. Article for Schloss Oberhofen Foundation, pp.12–14.
- 32 La Trobe to Agnes, 30 October 1868, La Trobe Neuchâtel Archive, SLV, MS 13354, Box 3, Folder 21.
- 33 Jordi, p.37.
- 34 Ibid., p.27.



Reflections on La Trobe's gravestone

By Susan Priestley

Susan Priestley MA (Melb), RHSV Fellow and committee member of the La Trobe Society, is a practising historian with an interest in recovering lives and solving enigmas about people. Her eleven published histories embrace aspects of places, people and institutions in Victoria.

Through the beneficence of John and Loreen Chambers, the gravestone under which 'rests in the Lord the body of Charles Joseph La Trobe, Esqre, C.B., First Lieutenant Governor of the Colony of Victoria, Australia', at St Michael the Archangel churchyard in the East Sussex village of Litlington, has been recently restored, and an image circulated to committee members. Viewing it prompted me to explore the biblical text cited on the stone, taken from the Book of Isaiah XXXIII, verse 17, which reads: 'Thine eyes shall see the King in his beauty'. Turning then to John Barnes' splendid account of the life of this 'Traveller, Writer, Governor', published in 2017, I found that the author had been there before me. Barnes points out that only the first part of the verse is cited, whereas the second part is just as 'poignantly appropriate'. It reads: 'they shall behold a land that is very far off'.¹ Prominent among those far off lands to which La Trobe had travelled was Port Phillip/Victoria, where he had been head of government for '14 years, 7 months and 6 days', as he noted in his journal on the day the *Golden Age* cleared the Heads on 6 May 1854. He ended that journal entry with a biblical text from Psalm 16: 'What shall I render the Lord for all his benefits toward me?'²



Charles Joseph La Trobe headstone,
St Michael the Archangel, Litlington,
East Sussex, March 2024





St Michael the Archangel, Litlington, East Sussex
Charles La Trobe's headstone may be seen to the right
of the porch and the central window

All that led me to ponder whether La Trobe had left detailed directions for the inscription on his gravestone, including the biblical text. If so, it reveals that neither his spiritual faith nor a wry wit deserted him, despite the failure of his eyes that had afflicted him since 1862,³ which curtailed his ability to sketch and paint the Lord's creation in its beauty or write an account of the history of the far-off southern land that he had planned. Instead in 1872, three years before his death, he arranged the deposit of the primary

evidence he had gathered with the Melbourne Public Library,⁴ now State Library Victoria, the start of its rich La Trobe collection. Gravestones can still speak to us of people from centuries ago.

Endnotes

- 1 John Barnes, *La Trobe: Traveller, Writer, Governor*, Canberra: Halstead Press, in association with State Library Victoria [and] La Trobe University, 2017, p.350.
- 2 Dianne Reilly (ed.), *Charles Joseph La Trobe: Australian Notes 1839-1854*. [Diaries and Memoranda, with introduction and notes by Dianne Reilly]. Yarra Glen, Vic.: Tarcoola Press, in association with the State Library of Victoria and Boz Publishing, 2006, p.226.
- 3 Barnes, p.340, citing La Trobe's notes on failing eyesight, La Trobe Neuchâtel Archive, Australian Manuscripts Collection, State Library Victoria, MS 13354, Box 5, Folder 41.
- 4 La Trobe to James Graham, 19 March 1872, University of Melbourne Archives, Graham Bros collection 1961.0014/108-109, La Trobe Letters.

Forthcoming events

Invitations will be emailed to members in advance of each event.

Bookings are essential, except for the Sunday service

JULY

Thursday 18

Melbourne Rare Book Week La Trobe Society Lecture

Time: 6.00–8.00 pm

Venue: Tonic House, 386 Flinders Lane, Melbourne

Speaker: Historian Shane Carmody

Topic: Noted Donations to the Melbourne Public Library

Refreshments

No charge

Invitations will be emailed to members

RSVP: Friday 12 July

AUGUST

Thursday 1

La Trobe Society Annual General Meeting & Dinner

Time: 6.30pm

Venue: Alexandra Club, 81 Collins Street, Melbourne

Speaker: La Trobe Society member and historian Loreen Chambers

Topic: Wattle and Queen: The Alexandra Club, a club like none other

Cost: \$120.00 per person

Invitations will be emailed to members

RSVP: Friday 19 July

OCTOBER

Tuesday 15

La Trobe Society

History Month Lecture

Time: 5.30–7.30 pm

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

Speaker: La Trobe Society member and historian Lorraine Finlay

Topic: John Auchterlonie Creelman:
A ship's surgeon and colonial doctor, 1848
to 1889

Cost: \$25.00 per person

Invitations will be emailed to members

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER

Christmas Cocktails

Details to be advised

DECEMBER

Sunday 8 (tbc)

La Trobe Sunday Service

Anniversary of the Death of C J La Trobe

Time: 10.30 am

Venue: St Peter's Eastern Hill,
15 Gisborne Street, East Melbourne

Refreshments

All welcome

Bookings

For catering purposes, bookings are essential except for the Sunday service.

Email: secretary@latrobsociety.org.au

For the latest information on upcoming events,
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www.latrobesociety.org.au/events

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The back issues may be accessed at
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They may be searched by keyword.

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BACK COVER
La Trobe Family coat of arms

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

