

# LA TROBEANA



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

Vol. 6, No. 3, December 2007

*La Trobeana*  
is kindly sponsored by

Mr Peter Lovell

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## ***La Trobeana***

Journal of the C J La Trobe Society Inc.

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Front Cover

**Thomas Woolner, 1825 – 1892, sculptor**

**Charles Joseph La Trobe**

**1853, diam. 24.0 cm. Bronze portrait medallion showing the left profile of Charles Joseph La Trobe.**

**Signature and date incised in bronze I.I.: T. Woolner. Sc. 1853/M La Trobe, Charles Joseph, 1801-1875**

**Accessioned 1894**

**La Trobe Picture Collection, State Library of Victoria**

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## A Word from the President

The activities of the C J La Trobe Society have provided a great deal of interest and entertainment since our last edition.

The annual joint 2007 AGL Shaw La Trobe Society / RHSV Lecture has been one of the highlights of the year so far, with over 100 members of both Societies attending. Dr Robert Kenny's talk proved to be a thought-provoking examination of the role of religion in La Trobe's life. His paper sheds light on his apparent conservative - yet at the same time progressive views that informed his decision-making and policies towards Aboriginal Australians under his jurisdiction. We are pleased to say that he has been generous enough to allow us to reproduce it in full in this edition.

On a lighter note, we were delighted to accept man-about-town, Kenneth Park's, very kind offer to talk to society members about the fascinating Mural Room in the well-known and popular Melbourne restaurant, *Grossi Fiorentino*. Kenneth's stories about the painting of murals by Napier Waller, assisted by some of his students, made for an entertaining evening. This event was very popular, and thirty members and partners enjoyed the occasion.

The 2007 Annual General Meeting was held in September. For those who were unable to attend, a report by the Treasurer and annual accounts are included in this volume. Regrettably, I was unable to be at the meeting, and Susan Priestley ably undertook the evening's proceedings. We were delighted to hold our meeting in such a central venue, the Gryphon Gallery at the University of Melbourne, and look forward to utilizing it for future occasions.

As the year races by, we are now preparing for our annual Christmas Cocktails. This year the function will be held at The Australian Club, and will be hosted by our member, Michael Bond.

The function will be held on Friday 7 December, from 6.30 - 8.30 pm. Last year's function, held at the Melbourne Club, was very popular, with around seventy members attending. We look forward to a large attendance at this year's function in another of Melbourne's important Clubs.

At the forthcoming Christmas Cocktails we will be able to celebrate one of our great achievements of the year. Our speaker for the evening will be the inaugural La Trobe Society Fellowship holder, Dr Frances Thiele. Dr Thiele will talk to us about her project, and we look forward to hearing of the progress she is making in her research and writing with the assistance of the Fellowship.

For those who attended the Annual General Meeting, it was pleasing to see that the accounts of the C J La Trobe Society are in great health. Spending for the year has included the cost of functions, as well as the production of this Journal. As I mentioned in the last edition, and as readers can clearly see, we have upgraded our style and production with the assistance of Minuteman Press. It is now, you would agree, a highly professional, informative and vibrant journal published by one of Melbourne's small yet important historical interest societies. Yet again, I would like to express our gratitude to Peter Lovell of Lovell Chen & Associates for his generous sponsorship of *La Trobeana*.

The Society's future directions were discussed at the Annual General Meeting, and we were pleased to see the level of interest generated by our members. While the Committee work toward achieving the broader goals of the Society - organising functions, lectures and the production of this fine Journal - there are from time to time smaller projects to be undertaken. We are keen to encourage members to become involved in special projects as they arise, and it was heartening indeed that a number have expressed their interest in doing exactly this when it was discussed at the AGM.

Once again, I encourage you to talk to your friends and associates about becoming members of the La Trobe Society and enjoying the social and cultural benefits the Society offers.

With all best wishes  
Rodney Davidson



## Forthcoming Events

### December

Friday 7 December  
Christmas Cocktail Reception

On Friday 7 December, our annual Christmas Cocktail reception will take place at The Australian Club, 110 William Street, Melbourne. Our host for the evening will be Mr Michael Bond.

Refreshments will be served, and we will be entertained by the inaugural incumbent of the La Trobe Society Fellowship, Dr Frances Thiele. She will present a paper on progress on her research project 'Edward Stone Parker and the Aboriginal People of the Mt Macedon District, a case study of Superintendent La Trobe's management of the Port Phillip Aboriginal Protectorate'.

When: Friday 7 December  
6.30 - 8.30 pm

Where: Australian Club  
110 William Street  
Melbourne

Cost: \$55.00 per head

RSVP: 5 December, 2007,  
Hon. Secretary, Dianne  
Reilly - 9646 2112

## January

Saturday 26 January  
Government House Open Day

All citizens of Victoria and visitors to the State are invited to visit Government House, Melbourne, on Australia Day 2008. Visitors will be able to view the State Apartments, the Private Apartments and the Governor's Study. Many of these rooms are not normally open to the public.

Activities include:

- Visitors are invited to tour the House and Picnic in the grounds.
- Refreshments will be available for purchase.
- Children's entertainment in the grounds
- Musical performances in the grounds and inside the House.
- Gates will be open from 10.00 am until 3.30 pm
- Last entrance to the House will be 3.00 pm.

For further information, contact:  
Alex Hodgson or Chris Cregan  
Open Day Co-ordinators

Telephone: 9655 4211  
[alexandra.hodgson@govhouse.vic.gov.au](mailto:alexandra.hodgson@govhouse.vic.gov.au)  
[chris.cregan@govhouse.vic.gov.au](mailto:chris.cregan@govhouse.vic.gov.au)

## March

Thursday 20 March  
La Trobe's Birthday 2008

A special event is being planned for La Trobe's 207th birthday on Thursday 20 March, 2008. We will advise Members of details as soon as they are available.



# A Review of 2007 Events

## AGL Shaw Lecture

On Tuesday 26 June, the 2007 Annual C J La Trobe Society/Royal Historical Society A G L Shaw Lecture was held at the RHSV's premises in A' Beckett Street, Melbourne. Unfortunately, Professor Shaw was unable to attend on this occasion.

Over 100 members of both societies gathered to hear Dr Robert Kenny speak on the topic 'The Moravian Charles Joseph La Trobe'. Due to the interest in this lecture, the complete text is published in this edition of *La Trobeana*.

## Grossi Florentino

On Thursday 19 July, around 30 members were entertained at the landmark Melbourne restaurant, *Grossi Florentino*, where we heard La Trobe Society member, Kenneth Park, present an erudite lecture on the paintings and murals created by Napier Waller in the 1930s.

The scene was set in the Mural Room when members arrived to enjoy a glass of champagne and canapes. Kenneth spoke for over half an hour with detailed information about the background to the paintings, and some interesting trivia related to the paintings and their current conservation.

The set of eight panels depict views of Florence from the 13th to early 15th century. The subjects of the artwork include a portrait of Lorenzo de Medici, and Florence at the height of the Renaissance with famous figures such as Raphael, Michelangelo, Botticelli and Leonardo da Vinci.

This presentation was a most generous contribution to the social calendar of the Society by this busy man about town, and we thank him sincerely for such an entertaining evening!

## Report of the Annual General Meeting

The sixth Annual General Meeting of the C J La Trobe Society Inc was held on Monday 17 September at the Gryphon Gallery, 1888 Building, The University of Melbourne.

Whether it was the day of the week, the time of day or the weather, a smaller than usual number of members attended the meeting.

However, for those who attended, the Vice-President, Treasurer and Secretary reported to members on the current status of the Society's activities, finances and ideas for the future. The Treasurer's Report is reprinted in this edition of *La Trobeana*.



## A Word From the Treasurer

A gentle reminder to those who have not yet sent their membership renewals. Your subscriptions (\$30 individual; \$50 family) are vital for the work of the Society.

The response from those at the Annual General Meeting who volunteered to form the steering committee to consider our future directions was gratifying. A meeting will be called shortly.

Members will be delighted to know that sponsorship for the second La Trobe Society Fellowship under the State Library umbrella has been received. The generous donors are the members of the Shoppee Family of Luv-a-Duck fame.

For those members unable to attend the Annual General Meeting, a copy of the annual Statement of Income and Expenditure from 27/6/06 to 27/6/07 is included in this edition of *La Trobeana*.

John Drury  
Honorary Treasurer



# The 2007 AGL Shaw La Trobe Society / RHSV Lecture

## by Dr Robert Kenny

*The lecture presented by Dr Robert Kenny generated a great deal of interest from members, and we are delighted to have the opportunity to reprint his paper here.*

*Dr Robert Kenny has a PhD in history from La Trobe University where he is now an ARC post-doctoral fellow in the History Program. He was recently a fellow at the Australian Centre, University of Melbourne, where he was recipient of the 2006 Peter Blazey Fellowship for *The Lamb Enters the Dreaming* when it was in manuscript form. He has published several volumes of poetry and fiction, and articles on literature, religious history, and the history of science.*

## The Moravian Charles Joseph La Trobe

Charles Joseph La Trobe is seen by many as a political reactionary, an administrator whose unsympathetic response, for instance to miners grievances, led to the Eureka uprising. In this La Trobe is seen as an uncaring authoritarian, a man who looked back to the past, unable to see the political future of democracy and equality, even if he did establish some lasting institutions. But to see La Trobe in this way is have an understanding of the foundational history of our present civil society that does not stand up to scrutiny.

What I want to do this evening is show that La Trobe was both a conservative and a great progressive with his eye very much on the future. But more importantly, I want to suggest that any contradiction we may see in this grows, not from any contradiction within La Trobe himself, but from our inaccurate perception of the political past. This perception is based on the hypothesis that the marches of secularisation, of democracy and of equality, particularly racial equality, were as of one; a unified march of "the party of humanity".

La Trobe, motivated so much by the religious milieu of which he was a product, is a perfect counter-example to this hypothesis.

So I will begin with some comments on the bad press religion is having at the moment, because La Trobe is a very good foil to many of the misconceptions now being peddled. I then want to look at La Trobe's milieu and religious beliefs, and to then sketch how these beliefs shaped La Trobe's policies, particularly his policies towards the Aboriginal Australians under his jurisdiction.

It is a long time since there has been such a concerted assault on religion's very existence. True, Christian missionaries have been condemned throughout the last half of the 20th century in post-colonialist parlance as destroyers of indigenous cultures throughout the world. But this was an attack particularly directed at Christianity, not at religion per se. Indeed Christianity's big sin was its despoilment of indigenous religions. But now we have Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens, among many others, all asserting that religion, far from being a harmless delusion - an attitude most non-believers like myself would have been happy with a decade or so ago - is the "root of all evil", to quote the title of a Dawkins' documentary.

Much of this resurgence of aggressive atheism is a reaction to what is perceived to be a failure of secularism, and, behind that, a collapse in the ascendancy of reason. It is the product of the fear that we have entered the post-secular age, and, with that, the various advances in freedoms and knowledge made since the eighteenth century and which have resulted in democratisation and the recognition of the political equality of peoples, of whatever ethnic, gender, or sexual orientation, are now under threat.

They are under threat, lays this view, since they are all the product of the triumph of secular reason over prejudices, superstitions and dogged traditions that have been primarily the result of the shackles of religion. The achievement of these advances is seen as the result of the "enlightenment project"

or "modernity", and any resurgence of religion will return us to the dark ages of the pre-enlightenment world.

Science and democratisation are seen as the lynchpins of this project. Both are seen to be born of secular reason and thus can only thrive in an atmosphere of the secular state in which religion is marginalised. Science is seen to have overthrown the mythological, which is religious, basis of our understanding of the formation of the world. It has given us, instead of stories of floods and towers of Babel, the laws of nature and told us how we really came to be humans. And democracy has stripped away privilege as the basis of political power, at least in theory, and has created a polity built on the empowerment of all people within that polity.

Thus we can look back, within this view, at the intellectual and political history since the eighteenth century and see how reason, secular reason, has been the great harbinger of, the march of humanity, giving us the physicalist understanding of the workings of the world, and showing us the wisdom of accepting all human beings as politically equal. It is a wonderful story of the triumph of secular reason and science. And now, since 9/11, we are faced with, not just a clash of civilisations, but of religions. The old darkness has risen anew to capture the world in its shadows.

But the story of the march of secular reason, science and political freedoms is just that, a "story". It is a myth people like to live by, and even if it does not evoke the magical or the transcendent, such as Moses receiving the Ten Commandments, or Athena springing from the head of Zeus, it is still a myth of faith. First of all it ignores how difficult it is to define something as scientific. Karl Popper famously claimed that what made a theory scientific was that it could be falsified. That is, that while no theory could be proven, a scientific theory should postulate predicted outcomes that if not fulfilled will show that the theory is false. This is what designated something as scientific. It is a model many still find attractive, and as an ideal I think it does have some merit. But as many pointed out it doesn't really equate with what we know of the history of science, in which the majority of theories have been accepted

without presenting themselves as falsifiable. Darwinian Evolution is a great example of this, and it is one pertinent to a discussion of La Trobe because it was to have a great impact, shortly after his departure from office, an issue very important to him, the question of race.

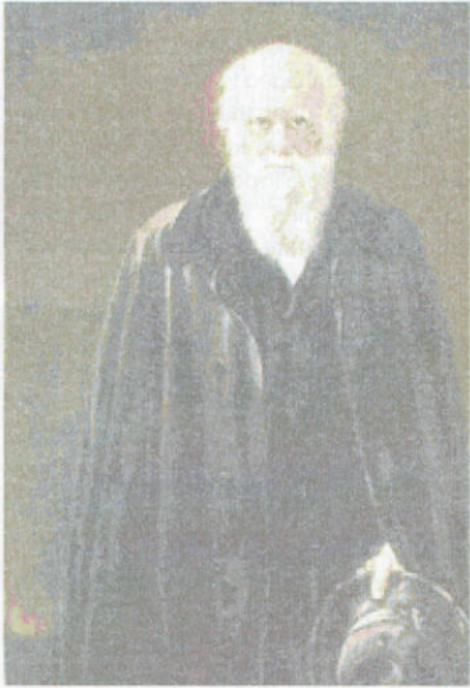
For most of its life as an ascendant scientific theory Darwinian evolution could not be falsifiable. Indeed for its first half century it couldn't provide a very plausible explanation of its mechanics, and what attracted people to it was its ideological support for the moral order to success. That is, its emphasis on struggle as the motor of development. If you survived as a species, it was because you were the best suited to survive, the species best fitted to the environment. This was used very often to justify might as right. I would not be the first to ask how Darwin's theory might have fared if it had not been produced at the moment when Imperial Britain was looking for a justification of itself. Of course, this social Darwinism, with a claim of European racial superiority, is condemned now as pseudo-science and a perversion of Darwin's theory, even though Darwin himself, in his *Descent of Man*, clearly held such views.

Pseudo-science is a wonderfully useful term for the champions of the moral superiority of science; they can use it to throw the moral mishaps of science into the rubbish heap of irrelevancy. Phrenology, seen as the coming science of the early 19th century and hugely influential on a range of disciplines particularly on the question of race, is now thrown out as pseudo-science. But its influence on scientific practice continued well into the twentieth century, particularly on scientific racialism.

The attacks on religion are not just the result of the aftermath of 9/11; they are also the outcome of the end of the Cold War. Gone from the Western imagination is its grand twin, the Communist bogey. This bogey was of course a great big atheist bully, which threatened freedom. With this as the threat, the Western liberal could treat silly and archaic religion as an ally.

The Cold War and its collapse is a salient reminder. What the aggressive atheists of





Portrait of Charles Darwin by George Sidney Hunt, Published by the Museum Galleries, London, 1922.

today seem to forget is that some of the most horrific regimes and actions of the past one hundred years have been carried out with a claim to being scientific and atheist. Marxist-Leninism claimed itself as scientific, and Soviet style regimes were very fond of condemning ideas they didn't like as pseudo-science, with often fatal results for the proponents of those ideas. But we should not forget the scientific roots of Nazi racial theory. Anti-Semitism may have religious roots but as such it was essentially a religious bigotry, conversion would usually save you. Nazi racialist theories offered no way out. Your fault was in your genes.

These theories were direct descendents of positions adopted in the arguments over race that took place in the 19th century. These debates were the probably the field in which the line drawn had religion on one side and the claims to science on the other. They were a debate out of the milieu into which Charles Joseph La Trobe was born. But what will surprise many is that those who came closest to arguing what we would consider racial equality came from the religious side of the debate, and those that proposed what we would call racism, and indeed extreme racism, came from the side of science. In one way or another,

most of the scientific argument of the mid-nineteenth century agreed that the races were unequal and that this inequality which was manifest in moral and intellectual attributes - was something that could never really be overcome. Proponents of these now disreputable ideas have nevertheless remained reputable themselves.

I will give you examples of those operating around the time of La Trobe's administration, or shortly after.

The Edinburgh anatomist Robert Knox is now often remembered as the man who fell into folly because he bravely fought for the scientific examination of the human body. What is forgotten in this characterisation is that he was as famous in the nineteenth century for writing *The Races of Men*, in which he argued that Africans and Europeans could not produce fecund offspring because they were of different species. Sir Richard Burton, celebrated as a liberator of literature and sexual mores, also claimed that the "clown" - by which he meant the African - could not be brother to the "crown" - by which he meant the European. And Thomas Huxley, Darwin's great champion, the Richard Dawkins of the nineteenth century, while pleased with the end of slavery, stated categorically that the "small-brained" African could never be the intellectual equal of the "large-brained" European.

All these men, besides having what we would call racism in common, had in common, as well, an avowed and aggressive atheism. They blamed religion as the creator of so much harm and the curtailer of true scientific investigation; a scourge that would hopefully soon fade from society, just as surely as would some of the "lower" races of men. And it is in these questions of race and religion, and misconceptions of the story of political progress, that light can be shed on Charles Joseph La Trobe's political vision. Let's begin by looking at his Moravian background.

La Trobe was not just a devout lay member of the Moravian Church, he came from the most prominent British Moravian family. As such he was a product of the Evangelical Revival that stretched from the mid-18th

century to the mid-19th century. But he was also a man of culture with strong literary and artistic interests. In this we can see a great Romanticist leaning. In an essay published a few years ago on La Trobe, A. G. L Shaw, who these lectures honour, rightly quoted a passage from La Trobe's book on his travels to the Tyrol as a great example of La Trobe piety:

a great and ardent admirer of the works of God, in all of which, from the stars of heaven to the midge sporting in the sun-beam, I find abundant food for thought... I have seldom held a flower in my hand ... without a feeling that the link that binds me to every living thing had become strengthened ...

This does show La Trobe's piety but it also exposes his Romanticism. There he is in the Romanticist's favourite aesthetic playground, the Tyrol, feeling his connection to every living thing, that is, to the Absolute, or the sublime. A meeting of Evangelical Christianity, culture and Romanticism should not surprise us. Part of the myth if you like of the Enlightenment I spoke of earlier, is that the Evangelical revival sprang up in reaction to the Enlightenment and as such celebrated anti-intellectualism and philistinism. This is far too simple a view of the eighteenth-century and of the Evangelical revival which had its own impetus independent of the Enlightenment and had a complex relationship with culture and philosophy. The Moravian Church was a major catalyst of the Evangelical Revival, it was also the great manifestation of German Pietism, and, as is only now being fully appreciated, Pietism, and particularly Moravianism with its emphasis on religious feeling over dogma, was a fundamental root of German Romanticism. Many of the major figures of German Romanticism, indeed of German philosophy in general, had Pietist, often Moravian backgrounds, including Kant, Schelling and Hegel.

Let me give a little background to the Moravian Church and the La Trobes. The United Brethren originated in Bohemia and Moravia among followers of Jan Hus. Hus had been burnt alive in 1415 for heresy. His most heretical act was to advocate the translation of the Bible into the vernacular.

Thus, the United Brethren claimed they were Protestants long before Martin Luther nailed his theses to the church door at Wittenberg in 1517. They managed to survive in Catholic central Europe until the late seventeenth century by remaining in remote areas, but more virulent Catholic persecution eventually forced them to flee. They found refuge in Saxony on the estate of Count Nicolaus von Zinzendorf. Zinzendorf, a Lutheran minister as well as an aristocrat, was an adherent of Pietism: a tendency within Lutheranism that emphasised the experience of faith over religious dogmatism.

The Pietists in the imperial German states were, at that time, themselves under pressure from the Lutheran authorities (Zinzendorf had spent some years in exile), and many had come to Zinzendorf's estate in search of refuge. So, too, had other dissident religious groups and individuals. As the various other dissidents joined them, the community descended into religious confusion, with acrimonious conflict over dogma, until Zinzendorf himself intervened with a vision of a 'Church within a Church'. He found in Zittau's reference library an old Latin translation of the original 'Account of Discipline' of the United Brethren, and to his delight it concurred with his own beliefs. The result was that on August 13, 1727, during a series of prayer meetings and communions, the hitherto discordant communities experienced a spiritual firing that welded them into the Renewed United Brethren, under the leadership of Zinzendorf.

Small though the Moravian Church would remain, its influence would be great. From the start, Zinzendorf saw missionary work as central to the church and, through the influence they had on such reformers as John Wesley, this is how the Moravians became the major catalyst of the evangelical revival of the eighteenth century.

The first Missionaries left Herrnhut in 1732, a moment seen by many "as the beginning of the world wide missionary movement." Zinzendorf spent some time in England and, under authority of the British Government, mainly sent missionaries to British colonies and possessions.

A major field of Moravian activity was amongst the slaves and ex-slaves of the West Indies. British Evangelicals, along with Quakers, played the major role in the British Anti-slavery movements but the Moravians were never overt supporters of these movements. Politically their "quietist" acceptance of the political status quo meant they could not interfere in issues of State. But while they played no overt role in the Anti-slavery movement, covertly many Moravians' gave practical support to the movement. One was Christian Ignatius La Trobe, father of Charles Joseph, who secretly supplied information to William Wilberforce on the condition and political situation of slaves in the West Indies.

The La Trobe family were Huguenot refugees. Charles Joseph's great-great grandfather, Jean La Trobe, joined William of Orange's army and fought at the battle of the Boyne. Thereafter he settled in Ireland. His grandson, Benjamin, aged 19, destined for a Baptist ministry, came under the influence of a Moravian community in Dublin and changed allegiance, attended the Moravian seminary at Niesky in Germany and was ordained a Moravian minister. He became the most important figure in the Moravian Church in the British Isles and an important influence on evangelical Christianity. The Moravian Church saw itself as a broadly based church working closely with other Protestant churches. In Britain it had close associations with the Evangelical branch of the Anglican Church. Benjamin was greatly admired by John Newton, the great evangelical who penned that most perennial of hymns, *Amazing Grace*.

This close involvement was continued by Benjamin's son, Christian Ignatius, who also became a minister in the Moravian Church and Secretary of the Church in Britain and its Empire. Christian Ignatius' son, Peter, followed his father into the ministry and into the position of secretary of the Moravian Church in Britain. Peter's brother, Charles Joseph, was also tempted by the ministry but decided against it, although he remained, as we shall see, a devout Christian attached to the Moravian faith.

Charles Joseph's early life shows a man of many interests. We see in it how little

the dichotomy of the story I began with - religion versus science - can be seen as manifest in his life. Forever attached to his evangelical Christian roots, La Trobe is anything but the anti-intellectual philistine evangelicals were supposed to be. He was interested in science, particularly botany, art, and especially literature. I am, I think, persuaded by John Barnes' suggestion that literature was the life La Trobe most aspired to, but he was a man who needed, too, to earn a living. It was this need that drew La Trobe to public life and it was his evangelical, particularly Moravian roots, which most informed that public life.

His first government job was to report on the education of ex-slaves in the West Indies. And these reports much influenced his appointment as Superintendent of Port Phillip - for one of La Trobe's most important tasks as Superintendent was to attend to the condition and status of the Aboriginal Australian population under his jurisdiction. To appreciate this we need to understand that the leaders of the anti-slavery movement saw the condition of Aboriginal peoples under colonisation and slavery as intrinsically connected. Leaders of the Anti-slavery movement, for the most



William Wilberforce the Friend of Africa plaque, State Library of New South Wales,

part evangelicals and Quakers, had founded the Aborigines Protection Society in 1838, one year before La Trobe's appointment as Superintendent of Port Phillip. This Society in its first report stated that "British enterprise and British means" had been the means of bringing misery to large sections of the globe. These people were not fringe radicals, they were people with powerful connections, many were members of parliament, and they had a sympathetic ear in the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Glenelg. This was the world in which La Trobe's father had moved.

These people were not democrats, and it is here that we see how the Enlightenment myth falls down. Charles Joseph was no democrat. He, like most of those concerned with the fate of Aboriginal peoples, did not believe in government by the people. Their concern to fight slavery and attend to the injustices suffered by Aboriginal peoples did not arise from democratic principles. It was motivated by a belief in racial equality founded on Holy Scripture. They believed that all peoples of the world were of One Blood, descended from Adam & Eve, and would, through education and the saving grace of Jesus, live equal lives.

This equality was not democratic. It still believed in class hierarchy as the natural structure of society. Most black peoples, like most white peoples, would be of the labouring classes. Sometime this is taken to mean that Aboriginal peoples were seen to never be able to be of any other class, but this is too simple a view. The movement to ordain Aboriginal converts is a case in point; such ordination would place the ordained into the class of gentlemen, as was the case of Samuel Adjai Crowther, a freed slave who eventually became Anglican Bishop of West Africa.

But of course there is a difficulty in this when we come to La Trobe's actual performance. While the welfare of the Aboriginal inhabitants of Port Phillip might have been a priority in La Trobe's appointment, most observers have seen in this area his most disappointing achievement. I think this is in some ways fair, but in other ways unfair. La Trobe was constrained by lack of resources and by the Port Phillip Protectorate, a

scheme that grew out of the Aboriginal Protection movement, but quickly lost the Aborigines Protection Society's support. Usually the failure of this Protectorate is put down to the personalities involved but the Aborigines Protection Society thought early that it was simply ill-conceived, without either adequate funds, or adequate power. La Trobe's true interest was in establishing a viable mission to the Aborigines, and by this he meant a Moravian mission. A mission would not just bring Aboriginal Australians to the Word of God, it would offer refuge and a means by which the original peoples of the colony could participate in the future of the colony, and thus, and this is very important, survive. And it is when the Protectorate is abandoned and a Moravian mission is first established that we see La Trobe's enthusiasm and concern become evident. Unfortunately it is an enthusiasm that would again be thwarted, this time by discovery of gold.

Moravians liked to imagine their field of activity as among "the outcastes of men", spreading the Word to the furthest ends of the Earth, to the most destitute and degraded, reputed to succeed where all others failed. It may seem surprising then that by 1848 they had not attempted an Australian mission. In fact a Mission to "the Natives of New Holland" had been a "long-cherished object" for the Moravians, and others had long been keen for them to establish it. In the early 1830s Major Irwin had written from the Swan River Colony asking the Committee of the London Association in Aid of the Moravian Missions (the London Committee) to establish a mission at that new colony, and in 1837 George Grey appealed for a mission in South Australia. However, in 1841 the Mission Board at Herrnhut replied to a request from the London Committee to embark on a Mission to Australia by declaring it was in no position to do so, as worthy as such a project would be, "because of the pressure of financial embarrassment". The London Committee tried again in 1844, citing one reason for reconsideration as:

... the very gratifying fact which they cannot but hope may be a providential opening for the promotion of the object in view, viz.  
- the appointment

of a member of the Moravian Church truly interested in the success of its mission to one of the Governments in Australia (Mr Chas. Jos. La Trobe) who had himself expressed a wish that Missionaries should be sent to the tribes frequenting the neighbourhood of Port Phillip.

Again the Mission Board felt compelled by circumstances to decline the invitation. This signalled no lack of interest amongst the Brethren. "[Z]ealous single Brethren" (as Peter La Trobe, C. J.'s brother, called them) "felt impelled" to go to this most distant and exotic land. They formed "Australian Associations" in their German towns to keep alive interest and work to carry out a Mission to the natives of New Holland. In 1848, their devotion was answered.

That year the Church of the United Brethren held a General Synod at Herrnhut. It resolved to commence, at last, a Mission "among the Natives of New Holland ... encouraged by several circumstances of a favourable character, which we could not help considering as intimations from the Lord Himself." They added: "It might indeed be presumption in us, to attempt anything for the spiritual benefit of a race, on whom, not a few of our Christian Brethren of other Societies have already appeared to spend their labour and their strength in vain. Nevertheless, we should consider ourselves chargeable with unfaithfulness, were we to disregard the providential leadings and directions of that Lord.

The United Brethren had long held deep respect for signs which might be "leadings and directions" from the Lord. The God the Moravians knew was a God still active in history. But what intimations from the Lord encouraged them in 1848 to enter the missionary field in Australia after so much delay, and with "no time to lose"? One was certainly Charles Joseph La Trobe's position. There was never any doubt that if the Moravians chose to begin a Mission to Australia it would be located in the district of Port Phillip, no matter what appeals came from the other colonies. Peter La Trobe wrote to the Mission Board at Herrnhut in 1844, telling them it would be foolish to do

otherwise since C. J. had expressed such a wish and they were exchanging "ideas and proposals".

Yet, in 1848, Superintendent La Trobe's position was not a new intimation. However, the year before he had "in consequence of instructions from Home, transmitted through the Governor in Sydney" set aside five reserves of Crown Land - under the new orders in Council, March 1847" - "to be definitely turned to account or not, as the interests of the native population might demand." I found a simple note amongst the Moravian Archives at Herrnhut; it is unsigned but the hand is C. J. La Trobe's. Headed "Port Phillip", it details "Reserves of land maintained, i.e., exempted from lease ... in obedience of instructions from the Home government" and dated 1847. Topping this list of five reserves is "Lake Boga, Murray River, 25 sq. Miles". Here was La Trobe informing the Moravian Church that land that could accommodate a mission was now clearly available, land with favourable resources of water and soil. One new "leading" for those in Herrnhut.

Another may have been the appointment, in that same year, of the very Evangelical Charles Perry to the Anglican See of Melbourne, the settlement's first Bishop (itself seen as a portent of Separation from NSW). Perry became almost immediately a close friend to La Trobe in Melbourne. They shared much in religious conviction and preoccupations "[the Bishop] has I find German blood in his veins", La Trobe wrote to his brother. Perry had been appointed Bishop of Melbourne on the suggestion of Henry Venn, Secretary of the Church Missionary Society in London, the same man who would be instrumental in appointing Samuel Adjai Crowther Bishop of West Africa.

But one of the most intriguing aspects of the Moravian decision to begin a Mission in Port Phillip is how closely it coincided with the decision to finally abandon the Port Phillip Protectorate. La Trobe's support of the scheme, foisted upon him by London, had been ambivalent from the beginning. He had always believed that the task of alleviating the misery and oppression of the Aborigines was best done by missionaries, and no

doubt he believed that the United Brethren would be the most suitable missionaries. The year after the Moravian decision, the Protectorate was finally abandoned, but the likelihood of that abandonment was something La Trobe would have been well aware of the preceding year and therefore it may have been known to the delegates in Herrnhut. It is possible that the decisions cross-pollinated each other with the Moravians understanding that a decision to abandon the Protectorate would be most likely if they decided to establish a mission. The advantage would be that reserves that might be associated with the Protectorate could now be assigned to the mission, as could any sympathy and public support. Whatever the case it is too much of a coincidence that the Moravians should arrive at the beginning of the year after the Protectorate was abandoned.

Whatever the 'leadings and directions' were, the Mission Board at Herrnhut now moved with 'no time to lose'. Two young Brethren were "appointed to engage in this interesting but arduous enterprise". They embarked for London in August 1849 and from there set sail to Port Phillip with a letter of recommendation to "Brother Ch. J. La Trobe". La Trobe promised the London Committee and the Mission Board, as he had promised his brother five years before, that he would give the missionaries his every assistance. And assist he did. Well "assist" is not a strong enough a word: from the moment Brethren Taeger and Spieseke disembarked in Port Phillip, they acted in accordance with La Trobe's "suggestions", "recommendations" and "advice". There is no evidence that they acted independently of such direction, at least not until they actually occupied the Lake Boga site in late 1851. (By then La Trobe was preoccupied: the District of Port Phillip had become the Colony of Victoria, with La Trobe its Lieutenant-Governor, and somebody had discovered it possessed a good proportion of the earth's gold.)

The Missionaries' deference to La Trobe is understandable - he was brother to their immediate superior in London as well as the highest official in the district. La Trobe confessed "more than common interest" in the project. His enthusiasm is evident. He

visited the La Boga site in January 1850, on the eve of the missionaries' arrival, and chose the mission site. La Trobe wrote later: "the examination of the locality and its neighbourhood led me to consider, at the time, that it was far from unfavourable to the attainment of the object in view."

In February, the Missionaries arrived and were "edified by the truly evangelical disposition of the Bishop Perry." In early April La Trobe wrote to his brother: "They have on my advice remained till this time in Melbourne and will Winter at the Aboriginal Station on the Loddon".

The Station on the Loddon was Edward Stone Parker's, who until the year before had been an Assistant-Protector. There, La Trobe continued, "they will see something of the natives - learn something of one of their principal Dialects - & at least get some insight into the character of their work & future prospects." This was no token gesture or practical means to get to the natives. It was out of the conviction that only in the vernacular could the Word of God be heard loudest. We often hear that the missionaries destroyed the native languages; this was not true of the evangelical missionaries and certainly not of the Moravians. Both Bishop Perry and La Trobe shared the belief in not so much the practicality of indigenous languages indeed they proved impracticable in Australia - but in the theological correctness of their use, after Jan Hus had been burnt at the stake for advocating the vernacular.

The missionaries did well as long as La Trobe was their director. Once he was distracted by the administrative and financial crises engendered by the gold rush, they fell into torpor. And once La Trobe had left the colony they fell into disputes with settlers and the government. The mission was abandoned in 1856. Not all the difficulties were of their own making and the collapse of the mission shows how much the concern for the Aboriginal peoples relied on La Trobe's personal patronage and how far their fate was from the minds of the representative government being established in the period. This government was concerned with the rights of the settlers, with questions of democracy and suffrage, and with land

reform. But it was little concerned for the fate of the Aboriginal peoples, and fought against Chinese immigration. It was the Anglican evangelical Septimus Lloyd Chase, a great supporter of the Moravians, who kept alive concern for both Aborigines and the rights of the Chinese. And it was under the patronage of another Governor, Henry Barkly, that attempts would again be made to ameliorate the condition of the Aboriginal Australians.

The enthusiasm for the Lake Boga mission is not the only sign of La Trobe's views. In 1842, for instance, in the Western District settlers had shot several Aboriginal women and a boy. Far from feeling shock at this event, the squatters, on whose run the murders had taken place, petitioned La Trobe to protect them from the natives. La Trobe's reaction was to warn the squatters that the wrath of God would be called down upon them. No wonder La Trobe never enjoyed wide support among the colonists.

Unfortunately time only allows us to sketch this aspect of La Trobe. La Trobe had a vision of what might be achieved by the colony of Victoria; he prudently set aside public land for a gamut of uses. He was patron, if not instigator, of many cultural institutions (although his faith led him to draw the line at supporting the scurrilous activity of theatre). That he was not enamoured of democracy does not mean he did not see a future for Victoria and for the original inhabitants, despite the fact that he no doubt saw in many of the settlers people of very poor moral stock. His great friend Bishop Perry

thought the colonists far more heathen than the natives, and set up a mission to the settlers in an effort to save them.

I hope I have given some sense that La Trobe represents a moment when what we see as allied causes, racial and ethnic equality and democratic rights and the ascendancy of the secular, were not allied in the mid-19th century. And that La Trobe's vision, and his concern for the Aboriginal Australian, was not in any way contradicted by his hostility to democracy. We see in La Trobe's evangelical concern for One Blood, how simplistic many of the present attacks on religion are.



**Group of Aborigines sitting and standing**  
c.1858 Richard Daintree and Antoine Fauchery  
La Trobe Picture Collection,  
State Library of Victoria

# The Swiss Connections of Governor La Trobe

By Dr Dianne Reilly

*The following paper was given by La Trobe Society Secretary, Dianne Reilly, to the Swiss Academic Network, Melbourne on 18 October 2007.*

The name 'La Trobe' is not a common one in Australia. Although some Victorians know that it was the name of the first Lieutenant-Governor of this State, very few know anything about the man or, indeed, the great vision he had for the colony under his administration.

The name has a distinctly foreign sound to it. Could it be French, or maybe even Swiss? But then, Victoria was a colony of Great Britain, not of France or any other European power. La Trobe had to be English and, indeed, he was. And all the more interesting, he was an Englishman with very strong Swiss connections.

He was born on 20 March 1801, in London within the sounds of Bow Bells, the son of Christian Ignatius La Trobe and his wife Hannah Sims. The La Trobe family was of Huguenot origin, having disseminated around Europe from Montauban in the south of France after the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685. His great-great-grandfather, Jean La Trobe, had left France at this period to join the forces of William of Orange, fighting in England in 1688 and in Ireland in the Battle of the Boyne in 1690. This La Trobe, known in the family as 'the Emigrant', settled in Waterford where he established himself as a linen merchant. Intervening generations of the family moved to London.

Christian Ignatius La Trobe, Charles Joseph's father, an accomplished musician and composer, and a friend of Franz Joseph Haydn, was like his father, ordained in the Moravian Church. He was a missionary, active in the anti-slavery movement, and was acquainted with the great William Wilberforce, the Member of Parliament who devoted himself to the cause of the abolition of the slave trade and of slavery itself.



Image of Christian Ignatius La Trobe 1758 - 1836  
J. Barber  
Collection: La Trobe Cottage,  
National Trust of Australia (Victoria)

Charles Joseph's religious upbringing were in the Moravian faith, and he was educated in Yorkshire from the age of six in preparation for the ministry, although he was never ordained. La Trobe's artistic talent was fostered and encouraged from his youth.

As the son of a gentleman, he was given the education of a gentleman himself. An amateur scientist, he found topography fascinating and sketched mountains and other natural features to record a landscape wherever he went. He was later described as the 'sketcher of no mean pretensions' by the great American writer Washington Irving, and he used his talent to depict the places he visited and the scenery about him throughout his life. The development of Charles La Trobe as an artist who could also record a building for official purposes, as well as for his own pleasure, is evident in the 437 of his sketches which still exist today.

After his schooling, La Trobe taught for a time at the Fairfield Boys' School in Manchester, and then embarked on a life as an adventurer and travel writer. In October 1824, he left England for



Neuchâtel in Switzerland where he had the job for three years as tutor to the young Comte Albert de Pourtalès who was also of Huguenot descent, a spoiled aristocrat.

When La Trobe arrived in Neuchâtel, he found a picturesque and flourishing university town nestled at the foot of the Jura mountain range on the shore of the Lake of Neuchâtel. The lake, thirty-eight kilometres long, and ranging between three and eight kilometres wide, commands the attention from every perspective. Physically, La Trobe discovered the town to be a small, well laid-out civic centre where the *hôtels particuliers*<sup>1</sup> of the bourgeoisie lined well-kept boulevards. The town owes its origin to its value as an easily fortified location where, in former times, the population were well protected by the Jura to the north, the Lake to the south, and the River Seyon to the west. The construction of a massive chateau was begun on the highest vantage point in the twelfth century as a residence for the Counts of Neuchâtel and, by the time that La Trobe had arrived, this imposing building had become the centre of government for the canton of Neuchâtel.

Dominated alternatively by the French and the Prussians, Neuchâtel was under Prussian rule from 1707 to 1798, and again from 1814. Neuchâtel had joined the Swiss Confederation in 1815, but continued under Prussian governance until 1857.

Social contact for the newly-arrived La Trobe was at the highest level. Not only did he frequent the Pourtalès mansion in the course of his teaching but, as an attractive and charming Englishman, he was greatly sought after as a guest in the salons of the merchants, bankers and nobility of Neuchâtel. In an era when many cultivated people were Anglophiles, he was also a frequent guest at the aristocratic country homes of the Neuchâtelois in various parts of Switzerland. It was often said at this period that everyone in Neuchâtel was related. Certainly, this was a fact among the noble families. A glance at any genealogical chart will show that the Mervilleux, Tribolet, Montmollin,



Comte Friedrich de Pourtalès with his sons Albert and William c. 1836 F. Krüger  
Collection: Archives de l'Etat, Neuchâtel

Osterwald, Pury, Pourtalès and many more families were all interlinked by marriages across the centuries. At that time, Neuchâtel was, as it is now, also a centre for commerce, with many of the private Swiss banks located there.

The family of Comte Frédéric de Pourtalès, which received La Trobe as a trusted tutor, had a background remarkably similar to that of the La Trobe family. The Pourtalès ancestors were also Huguenots who had managed to remain in France during the persecution following the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, before moving to Neuchâtel in 1720. Despite political uncertainty, the Pourtalès family prospered in banking, importing and exporting and related financial enterprises. Frédéric's grandfather, Jérémie, was elevated to the nobility by Frederick the Great in May 1750.<sup>2</sup> Frédéric himself gained the honour of attachment in 1809 to Napoleon's household as Master-of-the-Horse to the Empress Josephine.

In due course, he married Josephine's lady-in-waiting, the Comtesse Marie-Louise-Elisabeth de Castellane-Norante on 18 November 1811. The civil rites took place in Paris, after which the couple and

their families were invited to the chateau of Malmaison for the religious ceremony presided over by Cardinal Mauri, in the presence of the Empress. Comte Frédéric de Pourtèles went on to become a Swiss Councillor of State and *aide-de-camp* to the Prussian Prince Berthier, Comte de Neuchâtel.

Charles Joseph La Trobe was engaged for the education of one of their sons, Comte Albert-Alexandre de Pourtalès,<sup>3</sup> twelve years old at the time of La Trobe's arrival in October 1824. With frequent breaks to enjoy mountaineering, La Trobe tutored Pourtalès for nearly three years until February 1827 after which he returned to England, but they remained close friends, despite their age difference, throughout their lives.

In the course of his employment in Switzerland, La Trobe was diverted by the outdoor life. He became a pioneer alpinist and was noted for his skill as a mountaineer. He climbed peaks and later wrote about them for a readership in England which would never emulate him but only marvel at his feats. It is clear from his writings and his sketches from high vantage points that he was an able and inveterate climber. So talented a sportsman was La Trobe, and so great his love of nature, that he climbed previously unconquered mountains and crossed untraversed passes without the help of guides or porters. His climbs without companions were not entirely due to his love of being alone, although he had 'no objection to solitude'.<sup>4</sup> He was attracted by adventure and had the curiosity of the explorer. This foreshadowed many lone 'rides' in Port Phillip where, again, he was an explorer in another country.

After spending the winter of 1824-25 in Neuchâtel, tutoring his young charge and in private study, La Trobe set off alone in June 1825 on his first journey of discovery in the Alps, which was to last four months. In total, La Trobe made three extensive tours of Switzerland in his three years' sojourn there: the first, from June to October 1825; the second, between June and August 1826; and the third during September and October 1826. These are

described in great detail in his book *The Alpenstock*, which was first published in 1829.<sup>5</sup> This book was destined for popularity among the armchair travelers at home in England, and it went into two editions, obviously sought after by a readership hungry for access to other worlds.

Neuchâtel was the centre from which he set out on foot on each of his well planned travels, and he was very focused in the planning of his first journey. He intended to begin his travels with a visit to Avenches on the other side of the Lake of Neuchâtel, and then to proceed to the historic and picturesque village of Morat before heading to Thun, one of the principal towns on the Lake of Thun, adjacent to the Simmenthal Valley. The course of every day's journey was plotted in advance as, for example, his entry into the Simmenthal Valley:

My plan was now to turn my steps towards the Stockhorn chain to the Westward, and to visit the Simmenthal which lies behind it, before entering upon the examination of the higher and more central portions of the district termed the Oberland.<sup>6</sup>

The description of his view of the high peaks from a vantage point on the Wengern-Alp, between Lauterbrunnen and Grindelwald, is particularly evocative:

The Jungfrau and two Eigers, with the Wetterhorn and its neighbours to the Eastward, all rose before me in unclouded sublimity; the early morning sun lighting up one peak after another, and making the long waste of glaciers between them sparkle with the whiteness and brilliancy of burnished silver. As the sun rose higher, the light stole downward towards the immense range of dark granite precipices which supported them, and illuminated the exterior layers of fleecy vapour, rising midway from the depths of the Trumletenthal below.<sup>7</sup>

In the course of the three separate journeys described, La Trobe climbed the sizeable mountain peaks of the Stockhorn

(2,193m) and the Righi-Kulm (1,801 m), among others, viewed the Eiger, the Munch and the Jungfrau at sunrise, and traversed the Simmenthal Valley. He penetrated the Simplon, Brunig, and the Great St Bernard's Passes, surveyed the great Rhone Glacier at Gletsch which is the junction of the Furka and Grimsel Passes, visited the cities of Berne and Geneva, and the towns of Montreux, Thun and Zurich.

His tremendous physical stamina was demonstrated on his climb to the Convent of the Great St. Bernard Pass:

The last league of the ascent I found more difficult than I had anticipated, as the weather, which had favoured me hitherto, began to change for the worse. A thick mist overspread the mountains, and it hailed and snowed violently. Indeed so dense was the mist, that when the track led me on to that part of the mountain which was still covered with the unmelted snow of the preceding winter, I found myself more than once, excessively bewildered, and quite without track. By returning, however, and a careful examination on every side, I hit again upon the right path, and after half an hour's fatiguing climb over the snow and ice, got into shelter just as the increasing violence of the wind and snow storm began to make shelter necessary.<sup>8</sup>

Among his many scientific adventures, La Trobe related an intriguing occurrence he pursued until he obtained a satisfactory explanation:

I remember the report reaching Neuchâtel ... that the waters of the lake of Morat had suddenly become the colour of blood ... Many small fishes were seen to become intoxicated while swimming amongst it, and after a few convulsive leaps, to lie motionless on the surface.<sup>9</sup>

He listened with interest to local explanations of the odd occurrence, such as:

It is not known that this phenomenon has appeared before on the lake of Morat within the memory of man.

Tradition states the same to have happened the year preceding the great battle, [1476].<sup>10</sup>

He finally accepted the analysis of 'The naturalists of Geneva ... that it was an animal substance, which, if not the *oscillatoria subfusca*, was nearly allied to it'.<sup>11</sup>

He added as a useful appendix to *The Alperstock* a definitive list of Flora of the Chain of the Stockhorn, Canton of Berne and Additional Flora of the Opposite Chain of the Thurnen, a record which provided a practical basis for alpine plant studies at the Musee d'Histoire Naturelle de Neuchitel for decades thereafter.<sup>12</sup>

La Trobe's period of employment in Switzerland came to an end in March 1827. He had felt himself very much at home in Neuchatel, and it was with regret that his residence there had finished:

The thaw commenced early in March, and this was the signal for my departure from a country, which, much as I may love my own, had long ceased to be a foreign land to me.<sup>13</sup>

It appears that it was with his Swiss friends and employers, the Poutalès family, that he first felt the warmth of sincere friends who welcomed him into the heart of their close-knit family. Regretfully, therefore, he turned his head for home where, it is conjectured, no similar family centre awaited him. There is no evidence for this deduction, only the suspicion that lack of warmth at home, especially after the death of his mother in 1824, made him appreciate the generous and welcoming friends he had made in Switzerland.

La Trobe next travelled in 1832 when he accompanied Albert de Pourtales on a tour of more than two years in North America. This was an opportunity to meet his cousins, sons of Benjamin Henry La Trobe, the great American 19th Century architect, who was responsible for the redesign of the Capitol Building and the White House in Washington. This tour resulted in the publication of his next book *The Rambler in North America* in 1835.

La Trobe in his diary was very observant of the various aspects of the landscape

and the environment. He commented on the four major cities on the eastern seaboard. 'New York is the most bustling, Philadelphia the most symmetrical, Baltimore the most picturesque and Washington the most bewildering'.<sup>14</sup>

They also visited Chicago, and La Trobe's sketch in 1832 is the earliest known view of the environs of that city. They then ventured to Mexico, at that time a wild, disease infested outpost visited by few Europeans.

The book, which recorded this tour, *The Rambler in Mexico*, was published in 1836. La Trobe wrote in an engaging fashion for a readership at home who had no hope of ever visiting such an exotic and far-off land. There he made many detailed sketches of this fascinating landscape.

On his return to Switzerland in 1834, Charles Joseph was the guest at the home of Frederic de Montmollin, a Councillor of State. There, he met Sophie who was the ninth of the Montmollin's thirteen children and a cousin of Albert de Pourtales. They were married at the British Legation in Berne in September 1835. Taking advantage of the many contacts of his well connected family, he came to the attention of the Colonial Office in London and was offered an official posting of seventeen months in the West Indies. This was the great turning point of La Trobe's life. At this time the British West Indies were in turmoil. Almost 700,000 slaves had been emancipated in 1834. He sent four reports to the British Parliament, about arrangements for the education of the recently emancipated slaves on the islands. They so impressed the Colonial Secretary Lord Glenelg that in January 1839, he was offered an appointment in Australia as Superintendent of the newly settled Port Phillip District of NSW.

Charles Joseph and Sophie La Trobe, accompanied by their two year old daughter, Agnes, arrived in Sydney in July 1839. La Trobe had none of the training and experience which usually qualified a man for such an important administrative role. The typical colonial governor had a naval or military background. Charles

Joseph's was radically different. He was a refined and sensitive man who had spent years as a dilettante, imbibing all that was cultural and learned.

The La Trobe family took two weeks to reach Melbourne on 30 September, 1839 having encountered ferocious gales in Bass Strait en route.

He found that Collins Street was the only road worthy of the name, while Elizabeth Street followed a frequently flooded creek bed, and Flinders Street was little better than a bog. The water supply for Melbourne was increasingly inadequate and polluted. There was no town council to take care of local affairs. No development could take place without revenue being allotted by the government in far-off Sydney. The only building of note was the gaol.

What an amazing contrast this embryonic city must have presented to a sophisticated man who was accustomed to the elegance and size of London, Baltimore and Neuchatel! Melbourne in 1839 was only four years old, with a population of less than two thousand free settlers where, as he soon discovered, 'the arts and sciences are unborn',<sup>15</sup>

Not only did La Trobe have to equip himself with all the requirements for life in a remote country, he also had to bring with him from England a prefabricated cottage in the chalet style which he had erected on the then south-eastern extremity of the town. Soon after their arrival, their wonderful housekeeper, Charlotte Pellet, arrived in Melbourne with her young daughter Rose from Neuchatel to support Sophie. They were to remain in Victoria for the rest of their lives.

He was eagerly anticipated by the local population who expected him to act quickly on their desire for separation from the controlling powers in Sydney.

La Trobe's slowness to act on the question of separation from New South Wales was totally misunderstood by those clamouring for it. He, in the meantime, was pursuing it cautiously, believing that the timing of

its adoption was an all-important matter. He had recognised soon after his arrival what a handicap being part of the greater New South Wales was for progress in Port Phillip.

Separation was a great achievement for La Trobe and cause for universal celebration in the new colony of Victoria when it arrived.

No sooner had the advance news of separation been received, and at the same time the new bridge over the Yarra River officially opened, than the single most revolutionary and momentous event in the history of the colony occurred. Gold in enormous quantities was discovered, creating the dominant and most far reaching issue of La Trobe's 15 years in Victoria.



Glorious News! Separation at Last!  
**Melbourne Morning Herald**, 1850  
La Trobe Picture Collection  
State Library of Victoria

He visited the gold fields on horseback on several occasions to observe at first hand the conditions of the miners. The licence fee was not a successful venture.

It alienated the diggers who, more often than not, had not been successful in their search for gold and who were, therefore, unable to pay.

La Trobe was described by the Geelong Advertiser "Our Victorian Czar", a dictator imposing an unrealistic and impossible tax when no goldfield in 1851 had yet proven its wealth. La Trobe was not popular. The time was not there for him to deliberate. He had to make decisions, and these were sometimes the wrong decisions. The historian Geoffrey Serle concluded that, when faced with the appalling difficulties of the times, La Trobe had tried to 'govern chaos on a scale to which there are few or no parallels in British colonial history'. He had, in fact, managed to keep the colony for which he was responsible operating in circumstances 'in which the archangel Gabriel might have been found wanting'. The constant demands and the criticism of his every move or lack of action made him seek an alternative to the daily tediousness of Melbourne. In the fifteen years he spent as administrator of the colony, La Trobe made ninety-four major journeys through country Victoria which he carefully documented in his private diary and recorded in his sketch book.

He covered more territory in his country 'rambles' on foot and on horseback than many of his successors have done in more comfortable conditions. He was an explorer who charted routes, notably to Gippsland to investigate a report of coal deposits, and to Cape Otway where, after two abortive attempts, he personally blazed the trail to, and was responsible for the erection of the essential light house on that dangerous rocky promontory.

It was thanks to the La Trobes and their good opinion of the potential of Victoria for wine growing, especially in the Yarra Valley and around Geelong, that countless Swiss, mainly from Neuchatel, came to Australia. They included: de Pury, de Castella, Tetaz, Belperroud, Brequet and many others.

Well aware of his increasing unpopularity, despite his considerable successes, La Trobe submitted his resignation on 31 December, 1852. He was suffering from

stress induced by his long service in this often difficult colony and was concerned for Sophie whose health was far from robust. His resignation was accepted, but his successor, Governor Hotham, did not relieve him until May 1854. In the meantime, Sophie and three of their four children (Agnes, their eldest child, had been sent home to Switzerland for her education at the age of 7) who had been born in Melbourne - Eleanor, Cecile and Charlie - travelled to Neuchâtel where she died in January 1854. Sadly, La Trobe was to read of her death in a newspaper, which arrived in Melbourne before he was notified by letter from the family.

On 5 May, 1854, very nearly fifteen years after his arrival, La Trobe himself left Melbourne for London on the trans-Pacific route aboard the modern steamer, the 'Golden Age'.

Charles Joseph remarried in Switzerland on 3 October, 1855. His second wife was Sophie's widowed sister, Rose Isabelle de Meuron. A marriage with a deceased wife's sister was not recognised at that time in Britain, and because of its illegality there, he was never offered another government posting. However, such a marriage was legal in Switzerland and in some other parts of the world. Due to the lack of a pension at this time, La Trobe and his large family lived in a number of rented houses, one of the most notable being Ightham Mote in Kent.

Charles Joseph La Trobe died aged 74 on 4 December, 1875 at Clapham House in the village of Litlington near Eastbourne in Sussex, where he was buried in the local churchyard. Following his death the Chapelle de l'Ermitage in Neuchâtel was built to his memory in 1879 by his widow.

La Trobe made a significant contribution to the future cultural development of the infant city of Melbourne. Education was a major concern of the Lieutenant-Governor. In 1853 under La Trobe's aegis, the foundation stones for both the University of Melbourne and the Public Library of Victoria were laid. La Trobe was himself a patron and often the instigator of such cultural and learned bodies as the Philosophical Society,

now the Royal Society, the Mechanics' Institute, now Melbourne Athenaeum, the Royal Melbourne Philharmonic Society and the Royal Botanic Gardens.

La Trobe had a vision for the colony he had been sent to govern which bore little relevance to the contemporary period and those who lived in Port Phillip at that time. His long-term vision for Victoria was of a 'not only Christian but a highly educated community well versed in the arts and sciences' - a simple extension of his religious and cultural values. Certainly not honoured nor greatly appreciated during term in Port Phillip, and ill-rewarded by an ungrateful employer after his retirement, his memory deserves to be even better celebrated than it is at present. It is fitting that streets, towns, rivers and an electorate bear his name, and that the State Library and a fine university acknowledge their debt to him.

Although long overdue, how appropriate that the La Trobe Society has recently erected a full-scale bronze statue on the forecourt of the State Library to the memory of a Lieutenant-Governor who was equally at home in Victoria, England or Switzerland.



1 Hôtels particuliers are private town-houses.

2 Jacques Petitpierre, 'Journal Colonel Pourtalès', **Patrie Neuchâtoise**; Vième Volume de Chroniques Indépendantes d'Histoire Régionale, ed. Jacques Petitpierre (Neuchâtel: H. Messeiller, 1957), 35.

3 Albert de Pourtalès had an Australian connection in that he had attended the same school at Vevey on Lake Léman, not far from Lausanne, with William Macarthur, son of John Macarthur, during the Macarthurs' sojourn in Europe following the Bligh rebellion and arrest of Governor Bligh in New South Wales.

Reference: Shaw, A **History of the Port Phillip District**, 171.

4 Charles Joseph La Trobe, **The Alpenstock**, 6.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid., 16.

7 Ibid., 48.

8 Ibid., 266-67.

9 Charles Joseph La Trobe, **The Alpenstock**, (1829) 12-13.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid. *Oscillatoria subfusca* = algae of dark hue

12 Musée d'Histoire Naturelle, Neuchâtel.

13 Charles Joseph La Trobe, **The Alpenstock**, (1829), 383.

14 Charles Joseph La Trobe, **The Rambler in North America**, vol. 1

15 Charles Joseph La Trobe to John Murray, 15 December 1840, John Murray Archives, London

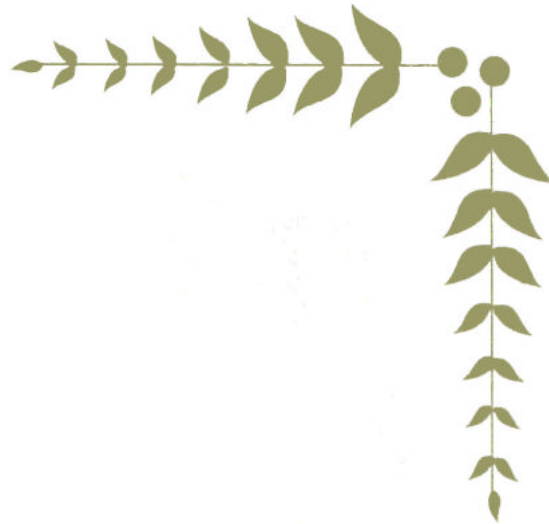
# C J La Trobe Society Inc. Balance Sheet 2006 -2007

**C J La Trobe Society Inc**  
**STATEMENT OF INCOME AND EXPENDITURE**  
**27th June 2006 to 27th June 2007**

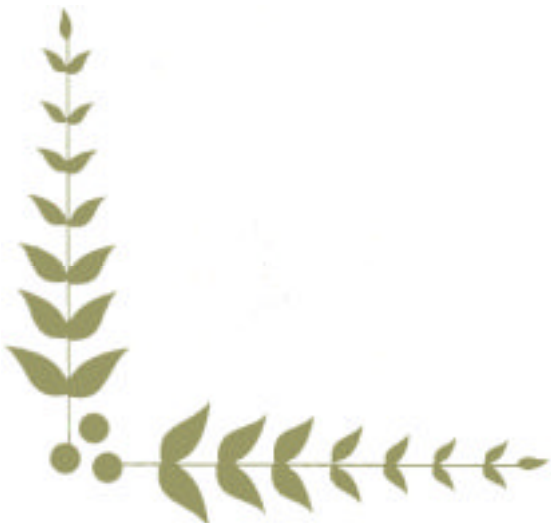
<b>Expenditure (\$)</b>		<b>Income (\$)</b>	
Christmas Function Melbourne Club	2,641.20	Income	3,465.00
Catering AGL Shaw Lecture	754.00	Income	623.50
Venue Assistant SLV	90.00		
Catering AGM	400.00		
Drinks AGM	161.41		
La Trobe Birthday	456.18		
Christmas Cards	648.18	Income	845.50
Postage	818.87	Interest	77.56
Stationery	919.57	Membership	10,830.20
Abaf Seminars - Fund Raising	400.00	Renewals, Book Sales	
Journal Inserts	21.88		
Refunds	226.00		
Web site development	320.00		
Web charges	159.00		
Consumer Affairs Return	37.60		
Garden Book Launch	102.20		
Donation Grave Restoration	400.00		
Statue Viewing Catering	480.00		
		<b>Credits</b>	<b>15,841.76</b>
		<b>Debits</b>	<b>9,036.09</b>
		<b>Balance</b>	<b>6,805.67</b>
<b>Bank Statement 27th June 2006</b>	<b>8,035.16</b>		
<b>Bank Statement 27th June 2007</b>	<b>14,840.83</b>		
<b>Increase</b>	<b>6,805.67</b>		

John S Drury Hon.  
Treasurer  
17th September 2007





The La Trobe Society wishes members  
a safe and joyful Christmas and New Year  
& we look forward to seeing you in 2008





*Journal Layout & Production*



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