

# LA TROBEANA



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

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*La Trobeana*  
*is kindly sponsored by*

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## ***La Trobeana***

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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.L.: 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

On behalf of the C J La Trobe Society Committee, I would like to take this opportunity to welcome you to what I am sure will be a stimulating and enjoyable year of lectures, tours and social events focusing on the life and times of Victoria's first Lieutenant-Governor, Charles Joseph La Trobe.

In 2007 the Society, and this Journal, enjoyed a great year of achievements. As this Journal continues to publish new research, I would like to reiterate how much we appreciate *La Trobeana's* continued sponsorship by Peter Lovell of Lovell Chen & Associates.

Highlights of the Journal's three editions in 2007 included a conversation with sculptor, Peter Corlett, as well as photographs of the unveiling and launching of his statue of La Trobe. The June edition included the publication of three groundbreaking articles. The first was research by Marita Hargraves. Her article 'C J La Trobe's Season in Van Diemen's Land' investigated La Trobe's time as acting Lieutenant-Governor in Tasmania from late 1846 to early 1847.

This edition also included lawyer and academic, John Waugh's article, 'A Monstrous Anomaly: La Trobe and the Legislature' which examined La Trobe's influence on the first Victorian Legislative Council. The charming Christmas 2006 talk by Caroline Clemente, 'La Trobe's Summer: Diversions, Excursions and Seasonal Celebrations', was also published in full. Finally, we were also delighted to have published the Annual C J La Trobe Society/Royal Historical Society A G L Shaw Lecture by Dr Robert Kenny, 'The Moravian Charles Joseph La Trobe' in our December edition.

The publication of these articles emphasises the fact that La Trobe's work in Victoria attracts scholars of a high calibre who are researching and writing about aspects of his life that have not, to date, been documented.

The year was one of particular social highlights. A tour of the fascinating Mural Room in the well-known and popular Melbourne restaurant, Grossi Florentino, was conducted by member, Kenneth Park. 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.

A very significant event for the Society was the awarding of the Inaugural La Trobe Society Fellowship under the umbrella of the State Library of Victoria to Dr Frances Thiele. We were privileged to hear her talk at our Christmas Cocktails at the Australian Club on 7 December, and I am delighted to note that her lecture, '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' is reprinted in full in this edition of *La Trobeana*.

After spending many months in Queensland, due to ill health, I was so pleased to have been present on the occasion of the Christmas Cocktails. The attendance by more than 70% of our membership was gratifying indeed, and confirmed my conviction that this small Society continues to offer a variety of informative, social activities of relevance and interest to a small number of Victorians. However, we hope the membership of our Society will grow, and 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.

The Social Sub-Committee of Dianne Reilly and Fay Woodhouse has put together what will no doubt be a program of enjoyable events for 2008 for Members and friends. The vexed question of La Trobe Cottage will be addressed at the 207th Birthday celebration in March. In June we will welcome Dr Val Noone to the Society as presenter of the 2008 annual joint AGL Shaw/RHSV Lecture.

Dr Noone will address the topic 'From Charles La Trobe to Charles Gavan Duffy: selectors, squatters and Aborigines' in his Lecture. In July members can look forward to a special tour in 'Marvellous Melbourne', and I can announce here that our Christmas Cocktails will be held at the Savage Club. Details of these events appear later in this issue.

And finally, I'd like to offer my warmest congratulations to our Honorary Secretary, Dr Dianne Reilly for her recognition in the Australia Day Honours. Dianne has been honoured as a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) for her work relating to Charles Joseph La Trobe, for promoting relations between France and Australia and to librarianship.

With all best wishes  
Rodney Davidson



## Forthcoming Events

### La Trobe's Birthday 2008

Members and guests are invited to celebrate La Trobe's Birthday on Tuesday 18 March 2008 at La Trobe's Cottage from 6.00 to 7.30 pm.

Our guest Speaker will be our President, Mr Rodney Davidson AO, OBE, whose topic will be: 'Some stories of the restoration of La Trobe's Cottage'.

This informal gathering has been scheduled two days before La Trobe's actual birthday due to the clash with the Easter break. Champagne, soft drinks and birthday cake will be served. Please bring a plate of savouries to share.

**Venue:** La Trobe's Cottage, Cnr Birdwood Avenue and Dallas Brooks Drive South Yarra, Melway 44 A12.

**RSVP:** 14 March

**Tel. 9646 2112 (Please leave a message)**

### C J La Trobe/RHSV AGL Shaw Lecture 2008

The Annual C J La Trobe Society/Royal Historical Society A G L Shaw Lecture will be held at the RHSV's premises in A'Becket Street, Melbourne on Tuesday 3 June. Our guest speaker this year will be Dr Val Noone. Drawing on primary and secondary sources, this lecture investigates the land policies of Charles Gavan Duffy in the perspective of the legacy of Charles La Trobe. In particular, the lecture focuses on policy changes and conflicts regarding squatters, selectors and the Indigenous people during the years 1858-9 and 1861-3 when Duffy was minister for lands.

**Cost \$20 per head.**

**RSVP: Dianne Reilly 9646 2112**

### Pioneer Service 2008

The annual Pioneer Service at St James Church will be held in November 2008. Members are encouraged to attend this commemorative service and details will be advised in a later edition of La Trobeana.

### Christmas Cocktails 2008

Continuing our visits to Melbourne's private clubs, we are pleased to announce that our Christmas Cocktail function this year will be held at the Savage Club, Bank Place, Melbourne on Friday 5 December. Our speaker on this occasion will be advised in a further edition of La Trobeana, and we look forward to the wonderful level of attendance these functions have enjoyed over the past two years. More details will be advised closer to the date.

### Charlotte Pellet Grave

As members are aware, the Society made a small contribution to the restoration of the grave of Charlotte Pellet, who was housekeeper to the La Trobes for many years at Jolimont. The work on the tomb has now been completed under the auspices of the Geelong Branch of the National Trust.

Mrs Jennifer Bantow, President of the Geelong Branch, has kindly invited members of the La Trobe Society and their friends to celebrate the restoration at a function in the Inverleigh Cemetery on Tuesday 25 March at 5.00 p.m., followed by meal at a local venue. Anyone wishing to attend should contact Mrs Bantow by email at:

**Jennifer.bantow@ncable.net.au**

**Or contact Dianne Reilly on tel. 9646 2112 (please leave a message).**

## Review of 2007 Christmas Cocktails

More than 70 La Trobe Society members and guests enjoyed the convivial surroundings of the Australian Club. The evening was kindly hosted by La Trobe Society member, Mr Michael Bond. We were privileged indeed to have enjoyed the function in the Ellis Rowan Room, surrounded by beautiful botanical murals by this important artist. During the evening Dr Frances Thiele enthralled the audience with her lecture on 'Edward Stone Parker and the Aboriginal People of the Mt Macedon District'. This was a report of progress on her La Trobe Society Fellowship at the State Library of Victoria. It is reproduced in this volume as 'Superintendent La Trobe and the Aboriginal People: A Challenging relationship'. We look forward to hearing more from Dr Thiele on the completion of her project.

## A Word from the Treasurer

We can all be proud that the Society has achieved significant goals since it began in 2001. Our achievements include the commissioning and installation of Peter Corlett's fine sculpture of La Trobe on the forecourt of the State Library of Victoria, and the endowment of the inaugural La Trobe Society Fellowship, under the umbrella of the State Library, in 2007. A generous sponsor for the 2008 La Trobe Society Fellowship has come forward, and we are now looking towards 2009 when we are seeking further generosity for this

worthy educational cause. Any advice or assistance with this tax deductible cause would be most welcome.

It goes without saying that, to achieve our aims for the future, we need a strong membership base, so please pass on your enthusiasm about La Trobe to others who may wish to become members of our Society. A phone call to the Treasurer on 0412 584060 will ensure a membership form will be posted to a prospective member, or one can be downloaded from the Society's website at [www.latrobesociety.org](http://www.latrobesociety.org).

John Drury  
Honorary Treasurer

## Publications

A limited number of copies of the following publications are available for sale:

- *La Trobe Journal*, No. 71, Autumn 2003, an issue devoted to La Trobe, and published by the State Library of Victoria Foundation. \$20.00
- *Victorian Historical Journal*, Vol.73, No. 2, Sept 2003, published by the Royal Historical Society of Victoria, an issue on La Trobe and his era.
- *La Trobe and His Circle*, a beautifully-illustrated catalogue of an exhibition held at the State Library of Victoria to mark the 150th anniversary of La Trobe's arrival. \$15.00
- *La Trobe's Jolimont: A walk round my garden*, illustrations by Edward La Trobe Bateman of Jolimont and its gardens, and written by La Trobe Society member Helen Botham. \$24.95

Please add \$4 for packing and postage.

Payment may be by cheque posted to Hon Treasurer, La Trobe Society, PO Box 65, Port Melbourne. 3207, or by Electronic Funds Transfer to 'The C.J. La Trobe Society Inc.' BSB 033-018 Account 149584.

# La Trobe and the Aboriginal People: A Challenging Relationship

By Frances Thiele

As Field Historian at the State Library of Victoria, I was fortunate to be given the opportunity to work with the Koorie Heritage Trust on a number of projects. One of these was the development of a significant website about the Aboriginal Missions and Reserves in Victoria ([www.abc.net.au/missionvoices](http://www.abc.net.au/missionvoices)). While conducting research for this project, I became particularly interested in the history of the Port Phillip Aboriginal Protectorate established in 1839 and officially ending in 1849. The period of the Protectorate coincides neatly with Charles Joseph La Trobe's superintendency of Port Phillip, however, his management of it has yet to be extensively studied. As La Trobe Society Fellow, I hope to further our understanding of this subject and while I am only just completing the initial phase of my research, I would like to present to you some of my thoughts so far.

Firstly, I want to discuss the British context in which the idea of the Protectorate developed because it directly informed the attitude of La Trobe to Aboriginal people and places him in his cultural milieu. Then I would like to go on to review a couple of aspects of his management of the Protectorate that will reveal the nature of his relationships to his subordinates. The source material available for this history is extensive and there are many issues that La Trobe had to deal with including, for example, the most violent period of conflict between Aboriginal people and settlers, increasing financial restraints on his Superintendency, and the often strained relationship between the Protectors and the settlers in their districts. While I can't discuss all of these today, I hope that I can give you a sense of the motives that inspired those who set up the Protectorate and of La Trobe's response to the challenge of carrying out their plan.

Many historians have described the Protectorate as a failure and I think they are right to draw this conclusion, at least with regard to the stated aims of the system to protect and civilize Aboriginal people.<sup>1</sup> I also feel, however, that to focus entirely on this single aspect of the Protectorate is reductionist. More interesting is how the individual relationships between the Protectors and La Trobe, and La Trobe with his superiors, effected the overall management of the system and its outcomes for Aboriginal people. In a broad Australian context the Protectorate is important as the first major strategic attempt by the British

Government to do something about the decimation of the Aboriginal population in Port Phillip and as such deserves more attention.<sup>2</sup>

Going on the assumption that most people I speak to have very little awareness of the existence of the Port Phillip Aboriginal Protectorate, some of you may well be wondering exactly what it was and where the idea came from. In order to understand the Protectorate you need to have some idea of the social and political climate in Britain at this time. William IV had succeeded to the throne in 1830. He was the son of George III, who had succumbed to periodic bouts of madness in his later years, and the brother of George IV who had come to the throne after a notorious period of indulgence as the Prince Regent. The popularity of the monarchy had dissipated and as David Thomson declared, 'the kingship of Britain was at a very low ebb'.<sup>3</sup> A wonderful period of British literature had just past, however, where the popularity of the novels of Jane Austen and Sir Walter Scott were equalled by the passionate outpourings of Romantic poets Wordsworth, Shelly, Keats and Coleridge. The British people were living in the wake of the American War of Independence, the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars. In 1815 they had rejoiced in victory at the Battle of Waterloo only to be confronted a few years later with injustices at home when 60,000 people were charged by the mounted yeomanry at Peterloo (1819).<sup>4</sup>

The process of industrialization, which had begun in the eighteenth century, and the post-mass unemployment put pressures on British society that resulted in considerable distress. The British Parliament was dominated by the wealthy and landed at a time when universal suffrage did not exist and power rested in the House of Commons where votes were bought and sold.<sup>5</sup> While party politics were more fluid than today, this was the period of the Whigs, the Tories and the Radicals when a movement for reform resulted in a series of important legislative changes. Arguably brought about because of the fear of popular uprising and the pressure of an increasing population of middle class, the legislative reforms of the early nineteenth century removed some of the inequities of the old hierarchical structures of British society. In 1830 a coalition of Whigs and Radicals won government from the Tories and pushed through a bill for electoral reform in 1832. The radicals encouraged the Whigs to further their reformist agenda



and it was in this political climate that William Wilberforce and Thomas Fowell Buxton were able to achieve the passing of the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833 (3 & 4 Will. IV, c.73). This was the time of the Protectorate, when parliamentary supporters of widespread social reform backed by non-conformist missionary and evangelical groups were able to grasp the moment of an incoming Whig Government to fulfil some of their objectives.

LaTrobe's appointment as Superintendent was a direct result of his connection to this movement for reform through his father, Christian Ignatius, and his association with the members of the abolitionist movement and more specifically the Clapham Sect. Led by Wilberforce, the Clapham Sect (whose original members all lived in and around the town of Clapham in Surrey) other evangelicals who joined together for the purpose of externalising their Christian faith initially through the abolitionist cause. Sometimes described as adherents of 'practical Christianity', they were not radicals but social conservatives who supported missionary endeavours throughout the British colonies and assisted in the formation of groups such as the Church Missionary Society and the Bible Society.<sup>6</sup> Christian Ignatius La Trobe and Wilberforce began their association during a Government Inquiry into the Slave Trade in the West Indies in 1788. The Moravians had significant missionary interests in the West Indies and as Secretary of the Unity of the Brethren for the Moravian Church, Christian Ignatius La Trobe was an important representative of this organisation and its interests outside Germany.<sup>7</sup>

Following the success of the anti-slavery movement some of the members of the Clapham Sect shifted their attention to Aboriginal peoples throughout the British Empire in addition to the welfare of emancipated slaves. Buxton put forward a motion in the British Parliament of 1834 that information be sought about the 'aborigines of Canada, South Africa, New South Wales, and Van Diemen's Land, comprising their treatment, the encroachments made upon their land, and any efforts on the part of Great Britain to give them religious instruction'.<sup>8</sup> Acting upon this motion the Parliament appointed a Select Committee to gather relevant information, interview witnesses and compile a report on the situation of Aboriginal people throughout the British colonies. The recommendations of this report formed the basis on which the Secretary of State for War and the Colonies, Lord Glenelg (Charles Grant,

Baron Glenelg), put forward his policy for the protection of Aboriginal people in Port Phillip to the Governor of New South Wales, Sir George Gipps. Glenelg ordered the appointment of one Chief Protector and four Assistant Protectors each of whom were responsible for a nominated region of Port Phillip.<sup>9</sup> Glenelg's despatch to Gipps may have signified the moment when the Protectorate came into being but where did Glenelg get the idea of the Protectorate from? For an answer to this question we need to turn to events in Van Diemen's Land.

The experience of the British with Aboriginal people in Van Diemen's Land influenced Glenelg's specific policy in relation to the southern Australian colonies. When the Select Committee sent despatches requesting that all colonial administrators report on the situation in their region, Lieutenant-Governor of Van Diemen's Land, Sir George Arthur, responded enthusiastically and put forward the idea of a 'protector of the natives'.<sup>10</sup> Arthur was an expert witness for the Select Committee and, ultimately, was able to advise Glenelg on his selection of the Protectors. Arthur's advice was incorporated into the Select Committee report and formed part of the official British Government response on the Aboriginal issue. Looking at the make-up of the Select Committee there was clearly a majority of members who were of the comprised a group of prominent Methodists and liberal reformist persuasion. Buxton, Edward Baines, and Joseph Pease, for example, were all members of the Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade.<sup>11</sup> During the sitting of the Committee, Buxton formed the Aborigines Protection Society with some of the expert witnesses, particularly Thomas Hodgkin, Saxe Bannister, Richard King and Rev. John Phillip. Other Select Committee members joined them in the Aborigines Protection Society including Edward Baines, Charles Hindley, Andrew Johnston and Charles Lushington. Further connections existed through marriage and religious affiliations. My point here is that the Protectorate was the product of a group of like-minded Christian reformers who were trying to do their best to avoid the demise of the Aboriginal people of Australia. Not only did this network socially and intellectually bind the Select Committee in London but it extended to the Colonial Office and to La Trobe himself.

Glenelg and his Permanent Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies, James Stephen, were both children of Clapham Sect members and knew of the involvement of La Trobe's father in the



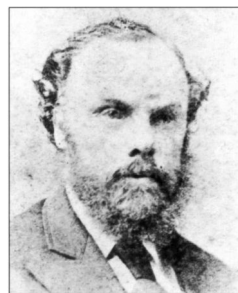
abolition movement.<sup>12</sup> When La Trobe sought a position in the Colonial Office, he reached out to these connections and secured an appointment reviewing the education of the recently liberated slaves in the West Indies and the schools set up by missionary groups funded from the British Government.<sup>13</sup> When the Colonial Office was looking for someone to fill the position of Superintendent in Port Phillip, La Trobe's experiences with Aboriginal people in the West Indies and his social connections made him a suitable choice especially given Glenelg's comment that 'one of the most important subjects, to which his attention should be directed, is the state of the Aborigines and the relations between them and the settlers'.<sup>14</sup>

Now I would like to look specifically at La Trobe's management of the Protectorate; his struggle to follow the principles of his ideology and the precepts laid down by the Select Committee for the amelioration of the condition of Aboriginal peoples.

One of the earliest issues La Trobe faced was the lack of information about Aboriginal people and the effect this had on determining the location of Aboriginal reserves that would serve as Protectorate stations. As A.G.L. Shaw concluded:

The well-intentioned plans – and hopes – of the Imperial government to assimilate, convert and civilise the Port Phillip Aborigines had failed – not surprisingly for, though apparently logical, they were quite unrealistic, being based on a false image of the Aboriginal people and a complete failure to recognise the Aborigines' association with their tribal land.<sup>15</sup>

The good intentions of the Select Committee were always going to be undermined by that now famous 'tyranny of distance' described by Geoffrey Blainey.<sup>16</sup> The Protectorate policy was developed without any cultural understanding of Aboriginal peoples and founded upon paternalistic Christian principles. In effect the Select Committee and the Colonial Office constructed an abstract notion of what they thought was appropriate for the assistance of Aboriginal people rather than drawing on actual experience. In the absence of reliable information Glenelg placed considerable weight on the experience of Arthur with the Aboriginal peoples of Van Diemen's Land. His uncertainty about what to do in Port Phillip led Glenelg to view George Augustus Robinson's removal of Van Diemen's Land Aboriginal people to Flinders Island as a positive answer to the issue of Aboriginal and settler conflict.



**E S Parker**

Robinson promoted his efforts in Van Diemen's Land to the Colonial Office and believed that a similar scheme could be put into place in Port Phillip. In February 1835 he detailed in a letter to Arthur a plan for the establishment of a central station for the convergence of Aboriginal people away from settlers commenting that 'The system adopted towards the aborigines of this territory is, I believe, quite unique; history does not furnish an instance where a whole nation has been removed by so mild and humane a policy'.<sup>17</sup> Glenelg believed in the benevolence of Robinson's approach and with the man himself, whom Glenelg described as 'so much distinguished by his active and enlightened humanity'.<sup>18</sup> All of this despite the clearly contradictory evidence that the only Van Diemen's Land Aboriginal people they thought remained was a population of about 120 on Flinders Island that had decreased by 1839 to 56.<sup>19</sup>

The problem of the paucity of information about Aboriginal people in Port Phillip was acknowledged at the time and Glenelg instructed the Protectors to 'obtain as accurate information as may be practicable of the number of natives within his District, and of all important particulars in regard to them'.<sup>20</sup> Unfortunately, Glenelg also directed that Aboriginal people be 'induced to assume more settled habits of life' on one of only four Protectorate stations that existed for the whole of Port Phillip before information could be sought from Aboriginal people about suitable reserve sites.<sup>21</sup> Putting this instruction into practise proved challenging, as Assistant Protector Edward Stone Parker soon realised in the Mt Macedon District. In order to narrow the focus of my research as the La Trobe Society Fellow, I have decided to use Parker as a case study of La Trobe's management of the Protectorate. Except for a few local history publications produced in the 1960s, the history of Parker's work in the Mt Macedon area has not been the subject of a specific study. I am not sure why this is, because by the late 1840s La Trobe and Gipps considered that he was the most successful of all the Protectors; his Loddon station exemplified the aims of the



John Drury presenting special bust to Rodney Davidson at Christmas Cocktails with Susan Priestley watching.



Dr Frances Thiele



Vice-President Susan Priestley



Willys Keeble and Suzie Leary



Treasurer, John Drury



Susan Priestley presents flowers to Dr Frances Thiele





Arthur Shoppee, Ian Mence and Suzie Leary



Caroline Clemente and Helen Botham



Brian Noble, Professor John Barnes, Rhonda Noble



Dawn Shoppee, Lucile Bond, Turkish Consul Ismail Civecic



Michael Bond, Ian Mence, Peter Corlett



Rhonda Noble, Dianne Reilly



John Stanley-Rogers, Diana Morgan, Beverley Joyce

protectorate to civilise Aboriginal people through religion, education and a settled life. Parker gradually developed quite a good understanding of Aboriginal people in his district. His comments often presented an alternative view to that of Robinson and La Trobe, who did not have the opportunity or experience of day to day contact with the Aboriginal population.

Parker found it difficult to gather information about the groups in his area without first learning their language and it took him a long time to attain census statistics, which were not completed until he had set up a reserve station on the Loddon River. Robinson was keen for his Assistant Protectors to roam the countryside with Aboriginal people but the impracticality of this made it impossible. This put him at odds with his own Assistants as all the other Protectors had wives and small children in their immediate care. Robinson derided Parker for not spending more time travelling about his district in the first year of his appointment, but as Parker explained in a report from early 1840:

It is my duty also to advert to the fact that I find it impossible to attach myself to entire tribes from the circumstance that the tribes are most usually broken up into small parties often ranging widely from each other in search of food. The only occasions when they assemble in any considerable numbers are when they resort to particular spots where some kinds of food may be abundant for a season; . . . As these occasions are not of frequent recurrence it is becoming daily more necessary that the Protectors should possess some point of concentration - some fixed station, to which he may invite and bring Aborigines.<sup>22</sup>

Parker came to the attention of the Colonial Office when Glenelg wrote to Arthur in November 1837 asking if he could suggest a number of people suitable for the position of Assistant Protector.<sup>23</sup> Arthur used his contacts with the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society to find suitable candidates and described Parker as a man who 'would have been readily employed as a missionary by the Wesleyan Society, by whom he is strongly recommended'.<sup>24</sup> He was running a Methodist Day School in Greater Queen St, London, when he was offered the position of Assistant Protector in Port Phillip.

Parker was keen to set up his Protectorate station and wrote to

Robinson in March 1840 listing the many advantages of such a place, not the least of which was the need to bring Aboriginal people under 'regular instruction' – both religious and civil.<sup>25</sup> Deciding on the location of such a station, however, took three years. Parker initially settled in Sunbury while his family was still growing and then at Robinson's urging explored the country to the north on the other side of Mt Macedon choosing a site near present day Maldon at Tarrengower before permanently settling further down the Loddon River at Larnebarramul near Mt Franklin.

The shifting location of Parker's station had fundamental implications for the Aboriginal people of these areas for whom cultural groupings determined access to land. The Gunung-willam-balug clan that Parker met in the areas around Mt Macedon were friendly with the Lear-ker-er balug clan of Tarrangower. When Parker shifted to Larnebarramul, the Gunagara-balug people of this area were not on friendly terms with the Gunung-willam-balug and so the Mt Macedon groups would not go there.<sup>26</sup> Parker was aware that inter-tribal relationships were important if he was to attract the largest number of Aboriginal people to his station. Writing to Robinson about the proposed site near Mt Franklin, Parker described one of its advantages as its suitability for the convergence of the Mt Macedon and Loddon Aboriginal peoples.<sup>27</sup> Clearly Parker did not yet have a grasp of the intricacies of clan relationships within larger tribal groups. As a result of this move, Parker lost touch with the Mt Macedon people and the fate of this group remains 'largely unrecorded'.<sup>28</sup>

La Trobe was astute enough to pick up some of these points, writing to the New South Wales Colonial Secretary, Edward Deas Thompson, in August 1841:

greater difficulty exists in making a proper selection of these reserves than might be imagined as it is particularly desirable that the prejudices and preference of the Natives should be fully consulted in the choice of localities and that if practicable such reserves should be placed where they might be accessible to and suit more than one of the numerous petty tribes into which the Aborigines of those countries are divided, no inconsiderable knowledge of the character of the people is requisite.<sup>29</sup>

Influenced by Robinson's early critical reports, La Trobe initially seemed hesitant about Parker but his attitude gradually

changed after a visit to the Loddon station in September 1841. La Trobe was sympathetic to the situation of Aboriginal people in Port Phillip and soon after his arrival expressed his support for the Protectorate writing to Robinson, 'I beg to assure you that I shall always be ready to assist you in any way in my power'.<sup>30</sup> He was reluctant to think ill of Aboriginal people and even more reluctant to use force against them.<sup>31</sup> When pushed, however, I think he was sometimes frustrated by his lack of ability to understand things from an Aboriginal perspective. This was evident in August 1841 when he wrote to the Colonial Secretary, 'it must be stated that they are an uncertain and wayward race – difficult to guide even in matters where it must be evident to them that their particular advantage alone is consulted'.<sup>32</sup> La Trobe appreciated the challenges faced by the Protectors and while his relationship with Robinson deteriorated over the Chief Protector's lack of ability to fill out forms and provide reports in the official format, he praised Parker's work on the Loddon.<sup>33</sup>

La Trobe was always reliant upon the information provided to him by the Chief Protector and through him, the Assistant Protectors. He stayed well within the bounds of the directives from Governors Gipps and Sir Charles Fitzroy on the issue of Aboriginal affairs and, ultimately, supported the views of disagreement between La Trobe and his superiors on this issue were rare.

The Protectorate was a controversial system put in place at a crucial moment in Aboriginal and settler relations.

La Trobe supported the philosophical position of the Colonial Office in London.<sup>34</sup> Moments approach of the individuals who developed the idea of the Protectorate but struggled with the daily reality of putting such a system into place. He kept himself at a distance from the Assistant Protectors believing that they were the responsibility of the Chief Protector and should report directly to

Robinson; but his management of relations with Aboriginal people suffered from Robinson's inability to fulfil the administrative requirements necessary for effective decision making. While La Trobe lost faith with the Protectorate as a means of making accommodation for Aboriginal people in the increasingly populated district of Port Phillip, he celebrated Parker's achievements on the Loddon. Parker ran a station that was able to reduce its reliance on Government support through agricultural endeavours, educate Aboriginal children in its own school, train several Aboriginal farmers who were able to establish their own properties, and make provision for the sick and the elderly. He stayed in the area until he died and is buried in the Franklinton cemetery.

Well, I hope I have been able to give you a feel of some of the issues that my research has revealed so far. I am sure that teasing out the complexity and contradictions of La Trobe's Protectorate will keep me busy well beyond my term as the inaugural La Trobe Society Fellow.

Thank You.



**George Augustus Robinson**

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> George Arden, *Latest Information with Regard to Australia Felix, The Finest Province of the Great Territory of New South Wales; Including the History, Geography, Natural Resources, Government, Commerce, and Finances of Port Phillip; Sketches of the Aboriginal Population, and Advice to Immigrants* (Melbourne: Arden and Strode Printers, 1840), 97-98; Michael Christie, 'The Failure of the Port Phillip Aboriginal Protectorate 1838-1849', *Australian and New Zealand History of Education Society Journal* 8, no. 2 (1979): 8-21; A.G.L. Shaw, *A History of the Port Phillip District: Victoria before Separation* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2003), 143.
- <sup>2</sup> Michael Cannon, ed., *Historical Records of Victoria: Foundation Series*, vol. 2B, *Aborigines and Protectors 1838-1839* (Melbourne: Victorian Government Printing Office, 1983), 373.
- <sup>3</sup> David Thomson, *England in the Nineteenth Century* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1950), 21.
- <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.
- <sup>5</sup> Llewellyn Woodward, *The Age of Reform 1815-1870*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), 26.
- <sup>6</sup> *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, s.v. 'Clapham Sect (abt. 1792-1815)', <http://www.oxforddnb.com/> (accessed 20 November 2007).
- <sup>7</sup> Dianne Reilly, 'Charles Joseph La Trobe: An Appreciation', *La Trobe Journal*, no. 71 (2003): 5; John Mason, 'Benjamin and Christian Ignatius La Trobe in the Moravian Church', *La Trobe Journal*, no. 71 (2003): 22-23.
- <sup>8</sup> 'News', *The Times*, 20 March, 1834, 2.
- <sup>9</sup> Cannon, *Historical Records*, vol. 2B, 373.
- <sup>10</sup> Great Britain, Parliament, House of Commons, *Report from the Select Committee on Aborigines (British Settlements;) Together with the Minutes of Evidence, Appendix and Index*, paper no. 538 (London: House of Commons, 1836), 679.
- <sup>11</sup> Benjamin Robert Haydon, 'The Anti-Slavery Society Convention, 1840', NPG 599, National Portrait Gallery, London.
- <sup>12</sup> Patrick Brantlinger, *Dark Vanishings: Discourse on the Extinction of Primitive Races, 1800-1930* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 73.
- <sup>13</sup> Davis McCaughey, et. al., *Victoria's Colonial Governors 1839-1900* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1993), 19.
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 19-20.
- <sup>15</sup> Shaw, 143.
- <sup>16</sup> Geoffrey Blainey, *The Tyranny of Distance: How Distance Shaped Australia's History* (Melbourne: Sun Books, 1983).
- <sup>17</sup> Great Britain, Parliament, House of Commons, *Report from the Select Committee on Aborigines (British Settlements) with the Minutes of Evidence, Appendix and Index*, paper no. 425 ([London]: House of Commons, 1837), 124.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.
- <sup>19</sup> Vivienne Rae-Ellis, *Black Robinson: Protector of Aborigines* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1996), 111, 165.
- <sup>20</sup> Cannon, *Historical Records*, vol. 2B, 375.
- <sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>22</sup> Edgar Morrison, *A Successful Failure, A Trilogy: The Aborigines and Early Settlers*, ed. Geoff Morrison (Castlemaine: Graffiti Publications, 2002), 22.
- <sup>23</sup> Michael Cannon, ed., *Historical Records of Victoria: Foundation Series*, vol. 2A, *The Aborigines of Port Phillip 1835-1839* (Melbourne: Victorian Government Printing Office, 1982), 30.
- <sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.
- <sup>25</sup> Edward Stone Parker to George Augustus Robinson, 18 March 1840, Unregistered Inwards Correspondence of the Chief Protector of Aborigines, 1847-1851, VPRS 11, unit 4, file no. 119, Public Records Office Victoria, Melbourne (hereafter PROV).
- <sup>26</sup> Ian Clark, *Aboriginal Languages and Clans: An Historical Atlas of Western and Central Victoria, 1800-1900* (Melbourne: Dept. of Geography and Environmental Science, Monash University, 1990), 163.
- <sup>27</sup> Edward Stone Parker to George Augustus Robinson, 26 January 1841, Registered Inward Correspondence to the Superintendent, Port Phillip District relating to Aboriginal Affairs, 1839-1851, VPRS 10, file no. 1841/186, PROV.
- <sup>28</sup> Ian Clarke and Toby Heydon, *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), 16-17. By 1843 Parker was aware that these people were not visiting his station.
- <sup>29</sup> Charles Joseph La Trobe to Colonial Secretary, 28 August 1841, Superintendent, Port Phillip District Outward Registered Correspondence, 1839-1851, VPRS 16, file no. 1841/967, PROV.
- <sup>30</sup> Charles Joseph La Trobe to George Augustus Robinson, 18 October 1839, VPRS 16, file no. 1839/42, PROV.
- <sup>31</sup> Charles Joseph La Trobe to George Augustus Robinson, 31 March 1840, VPRS 16, file no. 1840/125, PROV.
- <sup>32</sup> Charles Joseph La Trobe to Colonial Secretary, 28 August 1841, VPRS 16, file no. 1841/967, PROV.
- <sup>33</sup> Charles Joseph La Trobe to Colonial Secretary, 10 October 1842, VPRS 16, file no. 1842/1389, PROV; Charles Joseph La Trobe to Colonial Secretary, 16 March 1843, VPRS 16, file no. 1843/398, PROV.
- <sup>34</sup> The relationship between Governor Gipps and Charles Joseph La Trobe was 'remarkably smooth', McCaughey, 16.

## La Trobe Cottage – January Opening

Following the success of last summer's openings, the National Trust agreed to open La Trobe's Cottage on Sunday afternoons in January. The cottage was manned by La Trobe Society members Helen and John Botham assisted each week by members of the La Trobe Society, the Australian Garden History Society and the East Melbourne Historical Society.

A total of over 300 people visited the cottage. Most visitors had previously known little about La Trobe and his time in Melbourne, and the response from the public is always one of great interest, and appreciation to have had this opportunity to visit.

There are no plans currently to continue these week-end openings. Visits can be arranged through the National Trust, as part of a Government House tour on Mondays and Wednesdays.  
Helen and John Botham



## Member in the General Division of the Order of Australia (AM) – Dr Dianne Reilly



In the 2008 Australia Day Honours, founding member and Secretary of the La Trobe Society, Dr Dianne Reilly Drury has been honoured with the award of Member in the General Division of the Order of Australia. The citation reads:

For service as a contributor to the research, recording and preservation of historic records relating to Charles La Trobe, to promoting relations between France and Australia, and to librarianship.

- La Trobe Librarian, State Library of Victoria, since 1982; Ambassador, 2006; various roles, 1959-1982; cadet, 1959.
- Co-Founder, La Trobe Society, 2001; Honorary Secretary, since 2001.
- Founding Member, Institute for Study of French Australian Relations (ISFAR), 1986; Co-ordinator, *The French Presence in Victoria 1800-1991* exhibition; ISFAR was formed following this exhibition, 1984; continuing office bearer, since 1985; President 1981-1997.
- Member, Melbourne Diocesan Historical Commission, Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne, since 1983.

Published works include:

- La Trobe: The Making of a Governor, 2006: Dr Reilly's doctoral thesis.
- Charles Joseph La Trobe: Australian Notes, 1839-1854; Introduction and Notes by Dr Dianne Reilly.
- Co-author (with Jennifer Carew), Sun Pictures of Victoria: The Fauchery-Daintree Collection, 1853, 1983.

Awards/recognition include:

L'Ordre des Palmes Académiques, for Eminent Service to Cultural and Educational Interests in France, 1988.

Members of the La Trobe Society congratulate Dianne on the honour of this award.





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