

CHAPTER IV

CHARLES JOSEPH LA TROBE, A COLONIAL GOVERNOR

*“Ten to one, the only fate which awaits us is that of the hedger's glove; employed as long as circumstances or convenience suits, to protect the hand against the too close contact which the too thorny asperities of distant colonial rule, only, when worn out, or the call for such employment may have passed away, to be thrown aside to moulder on the bank.”*¹

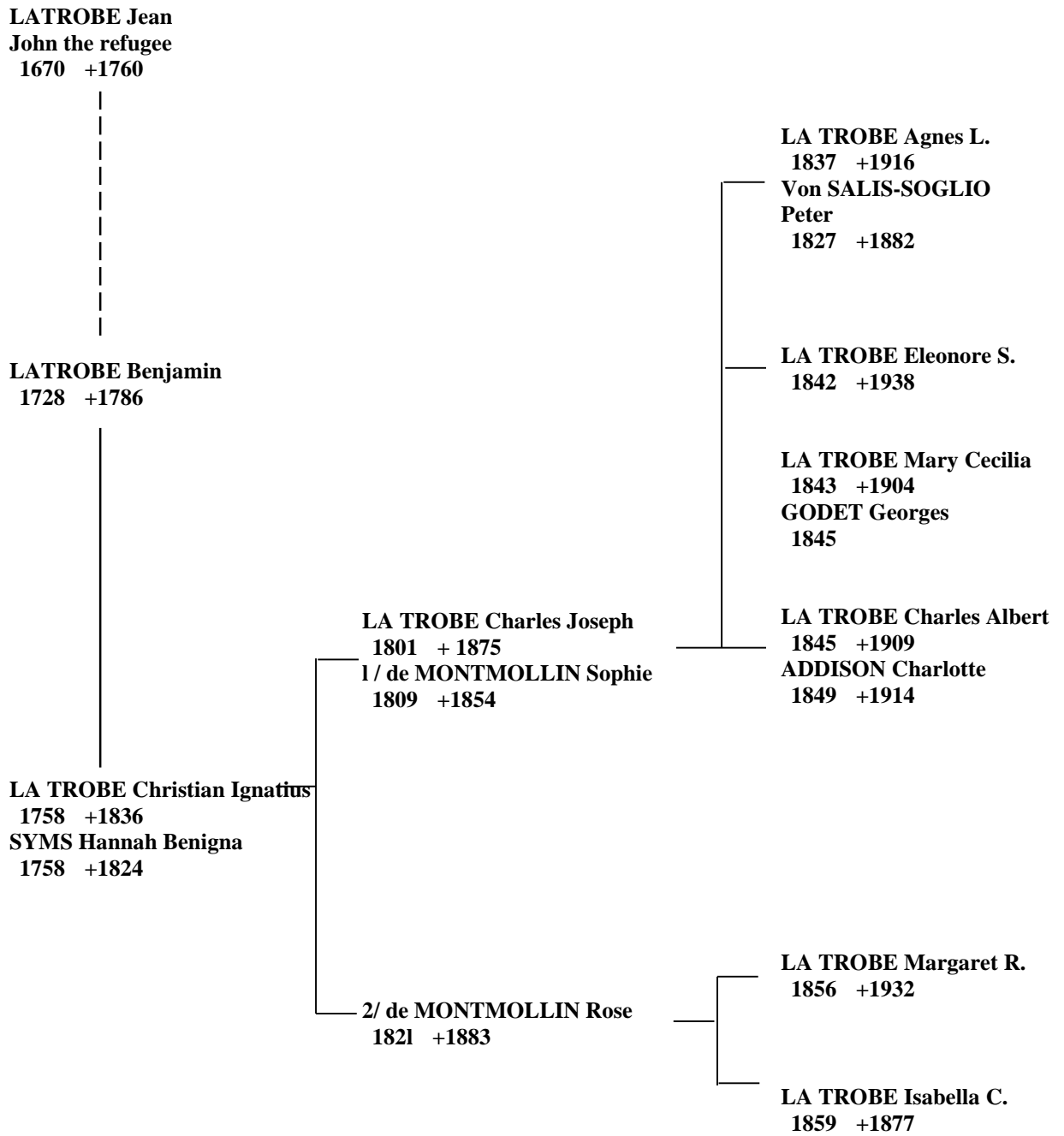
Thus wrote Charles Joseph La Trobe in 1863, some years after his retirement as Victoria's first Lieutenant-Governor in a draft statement of services prepared for the Colonial Office in London.

La Trobe's disillusionment and bitterness is symptomatic of how he felt after devoting fifteen years of his life to the management of a far-off colony at a critical and often turbulent period in its formation, only to find on his return that he was not even entitled to an appropriate pension. Despite the fact that he was only fifty-three years of age when he returned to England from his long and arduous service, he was never offered another post after his work in Australia, and he had to wait ten years before he was able to persuade the British Government to give him the most humiliatingly small pension. He received no acknowledgement of his services until he was made a Companion of the Order of the Bath in 1858. The documents supporting the granting of this honour refer to the fact that 'he had to bear the chief responsibility attaching to the Office of a Governor without having that freedom of action which attaches to a distinct government'.² Yet, despite tacit acknowledgement of the value of his contribution to the colonial service, he was awarded in 1865 the miserable sum of £333 6s 8d per year, under the provisions of the Colonial Governors' Pensions Act, this figure being formulated at the rate of two-thirds of one-third of the lowest salary of £1500 that he had been paid while Lieutenant-Governor in Australia. This sum was rationalised by the Colonial Office as being due to the fact that he had not held office as Lieutenant-Governor for the minimum period of eighteen years.³

La Trobe, therefore, employed a truly apt analogy in comparing himself to the protective glove of a hedger, used by the British Government to save it 'from the

1. H 7589 La Trobe Papers, Australian Manuscripts Collection, State Library of Victoria.
2. CO 448-1A, Public Record Office, London.
3. A.G.L. Shaw, 'Governor La Trobe', *Victorian Historical Journal*, vol. 61, no. 1 (March 1990), p. 30.

Charles Joseph LA TROBE 1801-1875 and his descendants



harsh realities, the thorns and brambles of colonial rule, and then, when it had served its purpose, cast away into a ditch',¹ as being of no further value.

Why was it that Charles Joseph La Trobe was ignored, under-valued and denied his just recompence for years of selfless devotion as the creditable and courageous contributor to the solid foundation on which the present-day State of Victoria in the south-eastern part of Australia is built?

He was born on 20 March, 1801, in London, the son of Christian Ignatius La Trobe and his wife, Hannah Syms. As we know, the La Trobe family was of Huguenot origin, having disseminated around Europe from Montauban in France after the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685. His great-great-grandfather John (or Jean) La Trobe, the Emigrant, had left France at this period to join the forces of William of Orange, arriving in England in 1688 and fighting in the Battle of the Boyne in 1690. After being invalided out of the army, he settled in Dublin, and from there, his grandson Benjamin went to England to train as a clergyman in the Moravian Church. Christian Ignatius, eldest son of the next generation, was also ordained in the Moravian Church and, in 1787, became Secretary to the Society for the Furtherance of the Gospel. He was a missionary, travelling to South Africa in 1815/16 and recording his experiences in his *Journal of a visit to South Africa in 1815 and 1816, with some account of the missionary settlements of the United Brethren near the Cape of Good Hope*.² He also translated various works including H. P Hallbeck's *Narrative of a visit to the new missionary settlement of the United Brethren...* Christian Ignatius was an accomplished musician and composer, and a friend of Franz Josef Haydn, and he is credited in *Grove's dictionary of music* with the introduction of contemporary European sacred music into England. Like his father before him, he was sympathetic to the anti-slavery movement, and had some contact with William Wilberforce, the English Member of Parliament who had devoted himself to the cause of the abolition of the slave-trade and slavery.

Christian Ignatius La Trobe was frequently away from his six children while on evangelical missions. In 1815, he compiled *Letters to my children, written at sea during a Voyage to the Cape of Good Hope*.³ These show the care and tenderness of a loving father, and reveal in their didacticism his concern for the education and social consciousness of his off-spring. The first letter, to Peter, the eldest, discusses music and the friendship of Christian Ignatius with a family by the name of Jowett who seemed to personify all the Christian virtues. To Charlotte, his elder daughter, he wrote of the evils of the slave trade and the work of Wilberforce; to Anna Agnes, he spoke of religious virtues and music; to John Antes, he described his Moravian

1. Kathleen Fitzpatrick, 'Charles Joseph La Trobe', *Victorian Historical Journal*, vol. 47 (1976), p. 253

2. La Trobe, Christian Ignatius. *Journal of a visit to South Africa in 1815 and 1816 with some account of the missionary settlements of the United Brethren near the Cape of Good Hope*, London, 1818

3. Chr. Ign. Latrobe. 'Letters to my Children, written at Sea during a Voyage to the Cape of Good Hope in 1815', La Trobe Papers, Australian Manuscripts Collection, State Library of Victoria.

work; and to Frederic, he spoke of the evils of sin.

In his lengthy letter to the fourteen-year-old Charles Joseph, whom he addressed as Joseph, he recalled his great fear of losing his infant son when two years of age from a debilitating fever, and the tremendous relief when the crisis had passed, and he communicated to Joseph the great importance of religious principles in living a good life.

It was within such a caring and cultured background that Charles Joseph was nurtured. His was a typical education and religious upbringing in the Moravian faith in preparation for the ministry, although he was never ordained, having decided not to enter the Church himself. He taught for a time at the Fairfield Boys' Boarding School, a Moravian establishment in Manchester, and then embarked on a life as an adventurer and travel writer. In October 1824, he left England for Neuchâtel where he became tutor for three years to the young Comte de Pourtalès who was also of Huguenot descent.

During his time in Switzerland, he became a pioneer member of the Alpine Club and was noted for his skill as a mountaineer. So talented a sportsman was he and so great his love of nature, that he climbed mountains and passes without the help of guides or porters. He wrote of his mountain climbs in his first book, *The Alpenstock, or Sketches of Swiss Scenery and Manners*, and the reader is immediately aware of both the sportsman and the scientist. A good illustration of this is given in his account of one such climb when he found himself in serious difficulties. He was exhausted and yet, was still alert to the discovery of a hitherto unlocated botanical specimen:

*"I felt both body and soul fagged to a degree I cannot describe; when, casting my eyes a little to one side, they rested on a plant for which I had till then sought far and wide among the Alps without success (aquilegia alpina) and the emotion of pleasure and surprise which was called forth in consequence instantly turned the scale, and gave me the strength of body and light-heartedness to do and to dare."*¹

His strength of character and his concern that his life should not be wasted on trivial pursuits began to emerge seriously when he was rambling in the Tyrol in 1830. He wrote in his second book of travel experiences:

*"SUPPOSING the words [were] addressed to me "What dost thou here, Elijah?" I have but a sorry answer to give —'Lord, I am on my road to the Tyrol, and mean to write, and paint, and botanise and amuse myself as well as I can and perhaps shall publish another —'pshaw this is humiliating and leads me to say internally — Well! I almost hope that much as I love this kind of life and the pursuits with which I enliven it, this will be the last summer of the kind. I have travelled enough in this manner, enough to satisfy ordinate desires, and if I do travel and spend my strength in future years in this manner, I pray God that I may have nobler aims and nobler purposes! — such as will not leave me to sit down and think as I have, and I fear may yet have, to think during the course of this summer — "Alas —I have spent my strength for naught."*²

1. La Trobe, Charles Joseph *The Alpenstock, or Sketches of Swiss Scenery and Manners*, 1825-1926. London: Seeley, 1829, p. 112-3.

2. La Trobe, Charles Joseph *The Pedestrian: a Summer's ramble in the Tyrol*, 1830. London: Seeley, 1832, p. 183.

La Trobe accompanied Albert de Pourtalès on a prolonged tour of America which began in 1832. They visited the chief cities of that continent and sailed down the Mississippi to New Orleans, before touring the prairies with the American author Washington Irving. Irving published an account of this journey in *A Tour on the Prairies*,¹ and mentions among his fellow travellers through the hinterland of the far west of America:

“Mr L....., an Englishman, by birth; but descended from a foreign stock; and who had all the buoyancy and accommodating spirit of a native of the Continent. Having rambled over many countries, he had become, to a certain degree, a citizen of the world and easily adapted himself to any change. He was a man of a thousand occupations; a botanist, a geologist, a hunter of beetles and butterflies, a musical composer, a sketcher of no mean pretensions; in short a complete Virtuoso; added to which he was a very indefatigable, if not always a very successful, sportsman. Never had a man more irons in the fire, and, consequently, never was a man more busy or more cheerful.”²

In 1835, La Trobe published his own account of the journey as *The Rambler in North America, 1832-1833*³ and this was soon followed by *The Rambler in Mexico, 1834*.⁴ While travelling in America in 1832-3. La Trobe took the opportunity to meet his cousins John Henry Boneval Latrobe, lawyer and inventor, and the younger Benjamin Henry Latrobe, like his father a civil engineer, both sons of Benjamin Henry Latrobe, younger brother of Christian Ignatius. While there, Charles Joseph took the opportunity to copy by hand into a notebook, *Extracts from my uncle Benjamin's private papers. Made in Baltimore Winter, 1833*.⁵ This notebook forms part of the papers known as The La Trobe Archive, purchased in 1990 by the State Library of Victoria. The first twenty-four pages of the notebook contain an account of Charles Joseph's grandfather, Benjamin, as recorded by his uncle Benjamin Henry. The grandfather had been a close associate of Dr. Johnson, Dr. Burney and other eminent men. He had also befriended and assisted the lowly. Other extracts copied from Benjamin Henry's private papers include anecdotes, poems, correspondence concerning schools and education, and descriptions of the American landscape.

On his return from America, Charles Joseph was a guest at the country house of Frédéric Auguste de Montmollin, a Swiss Councillor of State and soon after, he became engaged to one of the de Montmollin daughters, Sophie. They were married in the British Legation at Berne on 16 September, 1835.

1. Irving, Washington *A Tour on the Prairies*. Philadelphia: Carey, Lea & Blanchard, 1835.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 3.

3. La Trobe, Charles Joseph *The Rambler in North America; 1832-1833*. London: Seeley, 1835.

4. La Trobe, Charles Joseph *The Rambler in Mexico: 1834*. London: Seeley, 1836.

5. La Trobe Archive, Box 76/5, MS 1 3003, Australian Manuscripts Collection, State Library of Victoria.

Until 1837, when he was thirty-six, La Trobe's life was passed in a private capacity in the pursuit of nature, the pleasures of mountaineering, and minor travels with friends; but at this point, at a peculiarly late age for the nineteenth century, he was catapulted into the world of action. Almost certainly due solely to family connection—both his father and grandfather were sympathetic to the anti-slavery movement—he was sent by the British Government to report on the administration of funds voted for the education of the West Indian emancipated slaves. This was the great turning point of his life! At this time, the West Indies were in turmoil. On 1 August, 1834, two days after the death of Wilberforce, the 668,000 slaves in the British West Indies were emancipated. In spite of the £16,500,000 paid in compensation to slave owners, the planters were in a lamentable state of poverty. Most of the compensation money went to their creditors; there was a shortage of labour, poor prices for crops, and over-worked, exhausted estates. The price of sugar fell dramatically by fifty per cent. Many estates, mortgaged to the hilt, were abandoned. The wide-spread malaise of the islands was not a good climate for making lavish plans for education, although a definite effort was made. From England it must have appeared easy; La Trobe found this far from the case. He reported to the British Parliament¹ on the appalling sectarian divisions among the different religious groups on the islands, the detrimental effect these divisions had on the general population, and the need for Christian teachers who would impress religious principles and the necessity for honest labour on the natives. This report changed his life's direction. It so impressed the Colonial Secretary, Lord Glenelg, that only a short time after his return from the West Indies, in January 1839, he was offered a colonial appointment in Australia as Superintendent of the newly-settled Port Phillip District of New South Wales.

Charles Joseph and Sophie La Trobe, accompanied by their two year old daughter, Agnes, and two servants, joined the barque the *Fergusson* in London on 24 March, 1839. Not only did the new Superintendent have to equip himself with all the requirements for life in a remote country, he also brought with him from England a prefabricated cottage in the Chalet style. The voyage lasted 123 days, arriving in Sydney on 25 July. The La Trobes remained in Sydney for six weeks so that Charles Joseph could be tutored for his new responsibilities by his superior officer, Governor Sir George Gipps. Thus began a professional association which only ended with the death of Sir George in February 1847, seven months after his retirement from office in New South Wales. Gipps had written to La Trobe on his departure from Sydney:

"I cannot call to my recollection a single instance in which anything approaching to complaint or dissatisfaction has been expressed by either of us towards the other. You have during the long period of more than seven years, been in the uninterrupted

1. *House of Commons Parliamentary Papers* 1837-8, vol.48, *Accounts & Papers No. 113*: Copy of Report from C. J. La Trobe on Negro Education in Jamaica with correspondence relating thereto; *Accounts & Papers No. 520*. Copy of Report from C. J. La Trobe on Negro Education in the Windward and Leeward Islands.

House of Commons Parliamentary Papers 1839, vol.34, *Accounts & Papers No. 35*: Copy of Report from C. J. La Trobe on Negro Education in British Guiana and Trinidad.

*possession of my entire confidence; and I hope, trust and believe that you have entertained towards me the same kind and confidential feelings.”*¹

Gipps and La Trobe developed an excellent relationship based on friendship and mutual respect, the Governor acting as guide and mentor to the Superintendent, particularly in the vital relationship with their superiors at the Colonial Office in London.

As Superintendent, all La Trobe's decisions had to be approved by Governor Gipps who, in Sydney, controlled land sales, planning for public buildings, and the appointment of public servants throughout New South Wales. Thus, the revenue for the Port Phillip District was allotted by the New South Wales Government.

Gipps' detailed correspondence with La Trobe indicates the concern about Colonial Office reactions to his decisions, and fear that these reactions will be adverse to both of them and the territory they administered. The Governor had to adhere strictly to his instructions from the Secretary of State for the Colonies in London, and he therefore instilled into La Trobe a strict code by which he was to operate in Port Phillip. 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. He was in need of advice from one so experienced in the colonial sphere as Sir George Gipps.

Charles Joseph and Sophie La Trobe sailed from Sydney on board a barque of 361 tons, the *Pyramus*, arriving in Melbourne two weeks later on 30 September 1839 having encountered ferocious gales in Bass Strait en route. On the following morning, the Superintendent was rowed ashore to Liardet's Beach, now Port Melbourne, from which he walked into town. 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 Neuchâtel! Melbourne in 1839 was only four years old, with a population of less than two thousand, a figure that was to leap to nearly 4500 for the census of March 1841, and thereafter, to multiply in leaps and bounds to reach 23,000 in 1851.² But, when La Trobe arrived to take up his post, he found

*“it was a kind of big settlement... with houses, sheds and tents in clusters, or scattered in ones and twos. There were streets marked out, but... so dispersed that after dark residents incurred not only trouble but danger in moving about... There were several brick-built houses and a few weather-board cottages, with some, though not much, pretension to comfort, but the majority of the business or residential tenements were made up of colonial 'wattle-and-daub' roofed with sheets of-bark or coarse shingle...”*³

1. Shaw, A.G.L. ed. *Gipps-La Trobe Correspondence, 1839-1846*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1989. Letter 393, 7 July, 1846, p. 397.

2. Susan Priestley, Melbourne: a Kangaroo advance, *The Origins of Australia's Capital Cities*, edited by Pamela Statham. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

3. Garryowen (Edmund Finn), *Chronicles of Early Melbourne*. Melbourne, 1888, pp.108-9.

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. All revenue was allocated by the New South Government in far-off Sydney, a distance of 872 kilometres away. The only building of note was the gaol. What a colossal task he perceived before him!

La Trobe himself must have made a good impression on the citizens of Melbourne. He was a striking figure of a man in the prime of life at thirty-eight years of age, athletic in build and nearly two metres tall. His features were strong and gave evidence to his intelligence and certain judgment. He was warmly welcomed on 3 October 1839 by hundreds of Melburnians and, in reply, he expressed those principles he wished to inculcate into the inhabitants of this infant colony:

*“ I pray to God to Whom I look for strength and power that I may be enabled through His Grace to know my duty and to do my duty diligently, temperately and fearlessly... It is not by individual aggrandisement, by the possession of numerous herds or by costly acres that the people shall secure for the country enduring prosperity and happiness, but by the acquisition and maintenance of sound religious and moral institutions without which no country can become truly great.”*¹

He was eagerly anticipated by the local population who expected him to promote their desire for separation from the controlling powers in Sydney. He was hailed as ‘the patriotic founder of a new State’,² but they failed to recognise that La Trobe would, at all costs, do his duty by the Colonial Office in London. La Trobe's first task was to erect a temporary shelter for his family until his prefabricated cottage should arrive. La Trobe's Cottage, Victoria's first Government House, was first erected in what is now known as Jolimont after the name of his cottage which, in turn was called after Mrs La Trobe's home in Switzerland. It is now situated adjacent to the Royal Botanic Gardens. La Trobe insisted on purchasing the land on which the house was built, and the colonists assisted their impecunious new Superintendent by not bidding against him at the auction. The result was that he bought twelve and a half acres at the exceptionally low price of £20 an acre. Throughout his fifteen years in Melbourne, La Trobe lived modestly in this cottage. Although as head of the government and society, he was obliged to be hospitable and generous to worthy causes, his meagre salary would not have allowed for any extravagance.

2. 1. Shaw, A.G.L. ed. *Gipps-La Trobe Correspondence, 1839-1846*. op.cit. pp.4-5. Letter 2 – To Sir George Gipps from C. J. La Trobe, 19 October, 1839.

3. Gross, Alan, *Charles Joseph La Trobe*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1956, p.13, quoting the *Port Phillip Patriot*, 3 October, 1839.

After the welcoming early weeks of his governorship, La Trobe found himself faced with a first major difficulty. The people of Melbourne considered themselves victims of unacceptable control from Sydney. With La Trobe's arrival, they were confident that the restrictive policies, especially on public expenditure, were about to end. However, they failed to comprehend La Trobe's position as very much the subordinate to Gipps. When he arrived, he became 'the medium through which local agitation for separation and responses from the Colonial Office in London were channelled'.¹ La Trobe's acceptance of his role as 'second fiddle'² to Gipps served to open the floodgates of venom in the local press against what was perceived as his indecision and timidity. In fact, the *Argus* newspaper, edited by Edward Wilson, gave voice to the opposition to what was perceived as La Trobe's mismanagement of the colony by persistently harassing the Superintendent and even running the audacious headline: 'Wanted: a Governor!'³

The Melbourne Town Council was so disenchanted with what it perceived as an unsympathetic Superintendent that it petitioned the Imperial Government to recall him. Councillors brought trivial charges against him, such as: he did not maintain a social position befitting his role as Superintendent; he mismanaged the public purse; he neglected public works; he was not sincere in his relations with the Council; he was out of touch with ordinary people. These were all dismissed by Earl Grey, the Colonial Secretary in England, but La Trobe continued to find it difficult to obtain the trust of the Port Phillip residents.

The just public meetings on the separation issue began as early as 1840 when the local population conceived the idea of bypassing Sydney and petitioning the Colonial Office direct. Their view was that:

*"It is entirely undeniable that Melbourne possesses natural advantages far superior to any other seaport in Van Diemen's Land or New South Wales... From the central position of Melbourne, as well as from the richness of the lands of Australia Felix, the extraordinary influx of stock and population must soon render it one of, if not quite, the most populous of provinces in this hemisphere."*⁴

The result was the ordering of an increase by six members of Port Phillip representation in the New South Wales Legislative Council in 1843. This did not satisfy Port Phillipians who stepped up their efforts for the total separation of the Port Phillip District from the tyranny of New South Wales. 'Separation at last'⁵ only came about after much input from La Trobe and Gipps, who both wholeheartedly supported the concept. The Separation Bill was passed by the British Parliament on 11 November, 1850. On 15 July, 1851, after separation had

1. *Port Phillip Patriot*, 3 October, 1839; quoted Shaw: 'Governor La Trobe', op. cit., p. 21.

2. Priestley, op. cit., p. 228.

3. Quoted Gross, op. cit., p. 80.

4. 'Garryowen', op. cit., p. 906. Cited in Priestley op. cit.

5. 'Mr. John Waugh's reminiscences of Early Melbourne', *Victorian Historical Magazine*, No. 56, Dec. 1933, p. 18.

been proclaimed, La Trobe was sworn in as Lieutenant-Governor of Victoria.

Land policy was another thorn in La Trobe's side. The Port Phillip District had been settled in 1834/5 by pastoralists from Van Diemen's Land who squatted on the land and developed their agricultural holdings. Until the discovery of gold in 1851, Port Phillip remained a pastoral society divided into countless sheep-runs. The problems for La Trobe associated with the land concerned ownership and occupancy. The squatters had a monopoly on land occupancy, and those people not earning their livelihood directly from wool, worked at providing the services needed by the pastoralists. Then, in the 1840s, there was a depression in the wool industry with prices for the product in Britain crashing. La Trobe became aware of the dangers of an economy based on one commodity. He was not opposed to the squatters. He admired their achievements and, in fact, he numbered many of them as his friends, delighting in countless long rides on horseback far from Melbourne to their properties where he developed his great appreciation of the native landscape and local flora and fauna. He was accused in the *Argus* as being a squatters' man, but in fact, he was concerned, despite the imperial policy which protected the squatters' rights, that this group in the community had a virtual monopoly on land tenure. He therefore set about creating 700,000 acres of rural land reserves, thus making provision for space for towns and roads, land for sale to small holders, and allotments of natural bush for the enjoyment of all. This has provided a lasting benefit to the people of Victoria, as has the fact that La Trobe was virtually the creator of so many of the public gardens which make Melbourne the attractive garden city it is today. Due to La Trobe are the magnificent Royal Botanic Gardens founded in 1846, the Treasury and Fitzroy Gardens, the Flagstaff Gardens, the Exhibition Gardens to the north of the city, the Domain, Prince's Park, Yarra Park and Royal Park. La Trobe's vision for the Melbourne of the future was so clear, and it has given character and beauty to a city lacking many natural attributes in the landscape.

In 1846, Charles Joseph was acting Governor of Van Diemen's Land for a period of four months, following the discrediting of Sir John Eardley-Wilmot. He wrote an exemplary report to Gladstone, then the Secretary of State for the Colonies, his brief having been 'to inquire minutely into the state of affairs in Van Diemen's Land and to report thereon to the Home Government'. He was to check on abuses and failures of the Convicts Probation System and, in particular, he was to investigate cases of homosexuality among the convicts. Despite the difficult situation created by the fact that Eardley-Wilmot was still in the colony demanding an explanation of the charges brought against him, La Trobe carried out these tasks in an exemplary fashion and his report was considered a model of its type, bringing great credit to the author.

The choice of La Trobe for the position of Port Phillip Superintendent was based, at least in part, on his experience with difficulties caused to native populations by the arrival of colonists. Therefore, the Colonial Office expected of La Trobe an improvement in relations between white settlers and the Aboriginal

people. La Trobe saw his direction in attempting to bring Christianity to these people and in inducing them to realise the value of labour. In line with Colonial Office policy, he established various protectorates or mission stations where Aboriginal people were brought to be 'civilized'. La Trobe was generally sympathetic to the Aborigines and was totally opposed to the brutality some land-holders used against them. The Protectorate idea was not a success and failed completely in 1848, due to the facts that the Aboriginal people had their own codes of ethics and religion, and that they did not like living on the small reserves allotted to them.

Another problem facing La Trobe was related to the convicts sent from Britain to Australia. Unlike New South Wales and Tasmania, there were very few convicts sent to Port Phillip. La Trobe was quite definite in his opposition to the wholesale migration of convicts to the colony, and he had advised Governor Gipps of his views in 1842 and 1843. About this time, the imperial government decided to send some of the more well-behaved criminals direct to Port Phillip instead of Van Diemen's Land. Approximately 1700 'Pentonvillains' as they were known, arrived in the colony. Having at first been welcomed as a source of cheap labour, the arrival of more of these unfortunate people was soon opposed. When the convict ship *Randolph* dropped anchor, La Trobe refused to let the prisoners land and the ship went on its way to Sydney.¹ This action endeared La Trobe to his unruly townspeople, at least in the short term.

The dominant and most far-reaching issue of La Trobe's fifteen years in Victoria was the discovery of gold in abundant proportions in 1851 in Ballarat and Bendigo. Consternation was felt in Melbourne as almost every able-bodied man deserted his family and work in town and went to the gold fields. Melbourne was practically empty and it was virtually impossible to obtain the most basic of services for normal life. La Trobe asserted the right of the Crown to all gold located. Minerals were the property of the State. He went further and proclaimed a license fee of 30 shillings per month for all diggers going to the diggings. La Trobe visited the gold fields on horseback 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 raised the licence fee to £3 from January 1852, a 50% increase which led the miners and the press to protest so loudly that the increase was withdrawn after only two weeks. This enormous leap in charges, introduced in an effort to raise revenue to keep the public service operating in Melbourne, was thus universally unpopular. Since it was extremely difficult to collect the miners' fees, resources for government coffers were simply not available for such basic public services as road-building. Many gold-seekers were ex-convicts

1. Quoted Gross op. cit., p. 84.

from New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land, and their arrival heralded an increase in lawlessness. La Trobe demanded that the British Government should send soldiers to supplement the few military men in the Colony and the very small number of police who had not responded to the lure of the gold. Some small assistance arrived, and this allowed him to provide armed escorts for gold deliveries to Melbourne. The Convicts' Prevention Act, drafted in Melbourne forbidding the migration of ex-convicts to Victoria, was disallowed in England after La Trobe had assented to it in order to keep the peace. He risked dismissal by allowing it to remain in place until he could redraft it.

The unrest on the goldfields against the imposition of licence fees, and the attitude of the police and troopers who imposed the fee, were destabilising. When the Gold Commissioner arrived to enforce and inspect licences, a cry of 'Joe' was made as a warning to other diggers of the approach of the law. Charles Joseph La Trobe's name appeared at the foot of so many proclamations that he acquired the nickname of 'Charlie-Joe', and later, all government interference was referred to by the single name of 'JOE'.¹

Nevertheless, the licence fee remained in place and, when Governor Hotham had succeeded him, it was one of the major factors leading to the revolutionary armed combat of the Eureka Stockade between the miners and police in 1854. The Eureka Stockade was considered by many to be the birthplace of Australian democracy. It must be said that La Trobe's management of the goldfields was the weakest aspect of his administration, and he was severely criticised for it by the British Government. However, he had kept the government functioning throughout the goldrush years and, despite the odds, he had maintained the rule of law. By 1852, Melbourne, capital city of this gold-seekers' paradise, had become the most expensive city in the world!

Well aware of his increasing unpopularity, despite his successes, La Trobe submitted his resignation to the Secretary of State in London 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 1854. In the meantime, Sophie and three of their four children (Agnes had earlier been sent home to school) travelled to England and then to Switzerland where she died in January 1854. Unfortunately, La Trobe was to read of her death in a newspaper delivered to Melbourne before he was notified by letter.

On 5 May, 1854, very nearly fifteen years after his arrival, La Trobe left Melbourne for London on the trans-Pacific route aboard the modern steamer, the *Golden Age*. With 100 passengers on board, the ship travelled by way of Sydney, Tahiti and Panama in thirty-eight days, a distance of 9862 miles.²

In 1853, under La Trobe's aegis, the foundation for both the University of Melbourne and the Public Library of Victoria were laid. In that year also, work

1. Court, Jean. op. cit. p. 7.

2. Lawson, Will. *Pacific Steamers*. Glasgow: Brown & Ferguson, 1927, p. 34.

began on Victoria's first railway line from Melbourne to Sandridge, present-day Port Melbourne. Before leaving Melbourne, he had addressed a circular letter to a number of early settlers, requesting 'information respecting the early occupation and settlement of our Colony'.¹ About fifty-eight responses were forthcoming. In 1898, twenty-six years after La Trobe had sent them for safe-keeping to the Public Library of Victoria, the Trustees of the Library published them as *Letters from Victorian Pioneers*.

Unfortunately, La Trobe's failing eyesight prevented him accomplishing the task he had set himself in retirement—that of writing a history of the colony of Victoria. He had also planned to write an account of his Australian experiences under the title of *A Colonial Governor*, but due to his poor vision, this never materialised.

Charles Joseph remarried on 3 October, 1855. His second wife was Sophie's sister, Rose Isabella de Meuron, by whom he had two children, Margaret and Isabelle. Due to the lack of a pension, La Trobe and his new family lived in a number of rented houses, one of the most notable being Ightham Mote in Kent, an outstandingly beautiful medieval and Tudor moated manor house.

Charles Joseph La Trobe died on 4 December, 1875 at his residence *Clapham House* in the village of Litlington near Eastbourne in Sussex, aged seventy-four, where he was buried in the local churchyard.²

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 fact, education in Victoria was considerably better than in the mother country. La Trobe was himself a patron and often the instigator of such cultural and learned bodies as the Philosophical Society, the Mechanics' Institute, the Royal Philharmonic Society, the Royal Botanic Gardens, and the National Gallery of Victoria. He, it was, who voted in 1853 £13000 for land to enable the establishment of the Public Library of Victoria, now the State Library of Victoria.

It is entirely appropriate that Charles Joseph La Trobe's name has been perpetuated in so many places in south-eastern Australia. Numerous thoroughfares are named after him, a large and modern University bears his name, as does the La Trobe Library, the Australiana division of the State Library of Victoria. The colonial governor lives on!

Dianne REILLY-DRURY

La Trobe Librarian
State Library of Victoria

Lecture delivered at L.I.S.
Australian Embassy in Paris — May 7th 1997.

1. Bride, Thomas Francis *Letters from Victorian Pioneers*. Melbourne: Trustees of the Public Library, 1898, p. v.

2. 'Mr. C. Joseph La Trobe', *The Athenaeum*, No. 2512, 18 December, 1875, p. 830 (obituary).