

Charles Joseph LaTrobe

Melbourne, Victoria Colony, Australia

Personal

- Born 1801
- Huguenot, Father Christian Latrobe, Moravian Minister
- Wife, Sophie Montmollin, One Son and Three Daughters
- Wife, Rose Isabelle de Meuron, Two Daughters
- Noted Mountaineer, Pioneer Member of the Alpine Club
- Intrepid Traveler - Tourist
- Virtuoso, Renaissance Man, Vast Interests
 - Art
 - Botany
 - Zoology
 - Geology
 - Theology
 - Literature
 - Gardens



Educational

- Classically Educated in Switzerland for the Ministry

Professional

- Teacher, Moravian Fairfield Boys' Boarding School
- Tutor and Mentor, Noble Pourtalès Family
- Author
 - *The Alpenstock: Sketches of Swiss Scenery and Manners* 1829
 - *The Pedestrian: A Summer's Ramble in the Tyro* 1832
 - *The Rambler in North America: 1832-1833* (London, 1835)
 - *The Rambler in Mexico: 1834*
- Planned Education for Newly Freed West Indian Slaves
- Superintendent of Port Phillip District, New South Wales 1839-1831
- Lieutenant Governor of New Colony of Victoria 1851-1854

Civic

- Service Oriented – Dedicated to Ethics and Morals
- Founded the Mechanics' Institute
- Founded the Royal Melbourne Hospital
- Founded the Benevolent Asylum
- Founded the University of Melbourne
- Founded the Royal Botanic Gardens

Historical

- All Civic and Cultural Groups Founded Still Exist
- CJ La Trobe Society, Journal, La Trobeana, Three Times Each Year
- La Trobe Bronze in Forecourt of State Library of Victoria
- Died 1861, Chapelle de l'Hermitage

**Charles Joseph Latrobe came to Oklahoma in 1832 and passed by
Bald Hill, Holmes Peak on October 14.**

He created the Royal Botanical Gardens in Melbourne.

Tulsa Botanical Garden – Bald Hill

Latrobe –

Our course was much to the north of west, and lay over a line of wooded hills, rough on the sides and summits with fragments of sandstone, and of considerable elevation above the deep bed of the river to our left. We left the Bald Hill, a notable saddle-shaped eminence, rising from an elevated plateau, about a half a mile to the right; and about three o'clock in the afternoon, struck the Arkansas again. CJL 37-38

If you keep along yonder, by the edge of the prairies you will come to a bald hill with a pile of stones upon it. Well those stones were set up by the Osages as a land mark. From that spot you may have a sight of the Red Fork (Cimarron). WI 56-57

For the Class

Charles Joseph Latrobe, Tourist in Oklahoma

Latrobe was the best and the brightest of young men. His friends called him the virtuoso. This Tourist came as keeper and mentor to the young Count, to guide his adventure and to be understanding. He was the Tourist most esteemed by the others. He had already done great things. He wrote his own report of the Tour.

. . . an Englishman by birth . . . rambled over many counties . . . citizen of the world . . . a thousand occupations; a botanist, a geologist, a hunter of beetles and butterflies, a musical amateur, a sketcher . . . a complete virtuoso . . . never was a man more busy or more cheerful. WI 12

Commissioner Ellsworth was as approving of Latrobe as he was disapproving of Pourtalès. Many people in 1832 would have known the architect was Benjamin Henry Latrobe, famous for his work with Dolley Madison in Washington D. C.

When I first became acquainted with him I knew him only as an English gentleman, nephew to the architect, travelling . . . in company with M Irving & his Swiss friend . . . he is a gentleman deserving the highest estimation – He is well informed, judicious, and moral in his example, and “draws a clear well defined line between virtue & vice” -- and though he does not attempt absolutely to restrain his ward, yet he is very observing as to his conduct, and prudently advises, when he supposes his influence can produce any effect . . . HLE 69

CJ Latrobe -- His traveling companion, the young Count, was very happy to be with him, but could see his comic side just as he could see his own.

The unusually tall and lanky Latrobe, whose legs have never yet been measured by any mortal, was mounted on a little light colored, coquettish, thin horse which skitted about . . . moving at neither a walk, nor a trot, nor a gallop, nor an amble . . . CP 24

My Notes

LA TROBE, CHARLES JOSEPH (1801-1875)

About Charles Joseph La Trobe

Charles Joseph La Trobe was Superintendent of the Port Phillip District of New South Wales from 1839 to 1851, and Lieutenant-Governor of the new colony of Victoria from separation in 1851 until his departure from Australia in 1854. He was influential in many of Melbourne's government bodies and one of a number of eminent figures keen to foster the development of cultural institutions in Melbourne.

La Trobe was a proponent of a free public library for Victorians. His planning - including setting aside land and funds, and appointing Redmond Barry as Chairman of the Trustees of the Library - led to the opening of the Melbourne Public Library (now the State Library of Victoria) in 1856.

The [C J La Trobe Society Inc](#) was formed in 2001 to promote recognition and understanding of the achievements of Charles Joseph La Trobe. It celebrates La Trobe's birthday annually, hosts lectures, special functions and other events throughout the year and distributes the Journal, *La Trobeana*, to its members three times per year. The Society raised funds to erect a bronze statue of La Trobe on the forecourt of the State Library of Victoria in November 2006.



Charles Joseph Latrobe, superintendent and lieutenant-governor, was born on 20 March 1801 in London, the son of Christian La Trobe and his wife Hannah, née Sims. Like the young Count, his family was of Huguenot origin. His great-great-grandfather, Henri Bonneval La Trobe, had left France after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes to join the army of William of Orange and arrived in England in 1688; 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. As a missionary he travelled in South Africa in 1815-16 and in 1820 translated H. P. Hallbeck's *Narrative of a Visit ... to the New Missionary Settlement of the United Brethren ...* An accomplished musician and composer, Christian was a friend of Haydn and is credited in *Grove's Dictionary of Music* as introducing recent European sacred music into England. Like his father he was active in the anti-slavery movement and had some contact with Wilberforce.

Charles appears to have been educated in Switzerland and intended to enter the ministry. He did not do so but taught for a time at the Fairfield Boys' Boarding School, a Moravian institution in Manchester. In October 1824 he went to Neuchâtel, Switzerland, as tutor to the family of the count de Pourtalès who was also of Huguenot extraction. He remained there until February 1827, becoming a noted mountaineer: a pioneer member of the Alpine Club, he climbed mountains and passes without the help of guides and porters. La Trobe's first book, *The Alpenstock: Or Sketches of Swiss Scenery and Manners*, was published in 1829 and his second, *The Pedestrian: A Summer's Ramble in the Tyrol*, came out in 1832. As tutor or mentor La Trobe accompanied the dashing young Count Albert de Pourtalès during a tour of America which began in 1832. They visited the chief cities of North America and sailed down the Mississippi to New Orleans, and then toured the prairies with the American author, Washington Irving. Irving published an account of this journey, and La Trobe's *The Rambler in North America: 1832-1833* (London, 1835) was followed by *The Rambler in Mexico: 1834* (London, 1836). On his return from America La Trobe stayed at the country house of Frédéric Auguste de Montmollin, a Swiss councillor of state, and there became engaged to one of the Montmollin daughters, Sophie. They were married in the British Legation at Berne on 16 September 1835.

Possibly through the official contacts his family had made in the campaign for the abolition of slavery, La Trobe was sent by the British government in 1837 to report on measures necessary to fit the West Indians for freedom. He submitted three reports on negro education in the islands. In that year he also published *The Solace of Song*, short poems suggested by scenes visited on a continental tour, chiefly in Italy. In January 1839 he was appointed superintendent of the Port Phillip District; he arrived at Melbourne on 30 September with his wife and daughter, two servants and a prefabricated house.

La Trobe did not have the usual background of a colonial governor; he had no army or naval training, little administrative experience and, with his talents and interests, high principles and serious mind, he was a cultured gentleman rather than an intellectual or an executive. According to Washington Irving, 'He was a man of a thousand occupations; a botanist, a geologist, a hunter of beetles and butterflies, a musical amateur, 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'. For such a man the district of Port Phillip provided great pleasure; 'I had from the first a passion for the plains and for my solitary hard rides across them, and retained it to the last'.

La Trobe did not come to administer an established colony, for the Port Phillip District was then a new and rapidly developing dependency of New South Wales. As superintendent all his decisions had to be approved by Governor Sir George Gipps, his senior who in Sydney controlled land sales, plans of public buildings and the appointment of officers; the revenue for Port Phillip administration was allotted by the New South Wales government. Gipps and La Trobe were on excellent terms of friendship and mutual respect, the governor acting as guide and mentor to the superintendent particularly in relationships with their mutual superiors at the Colonial Office. Gipps's large correspondence with La Trobe is pervaded by anxiety about Colonial Office reactions to his decisions and fear that these reactions will be adverse. This fear may have been contagious, for La Trobe was charged with being indecisive and slow in action. Certainly he acted on Gipps's two rules: Keep your government out of debt and preserve the peace of the country.

Gipps had a steady and constant influence on La Trobe and when he retired in May 1846 penned a tribute to the younger man which must have propped up his always precarious self-confidence: '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 possession of my entire confidence; and I hope, trust and believe that you have entertained towards me the same kind and confidential feelings'.

La Trobe was content to be in a subordinate position to New South Wales but his colonists were not. Separation and convict transportation were two major issues of the superintendency. As early as 1840, when the population was only 10,000, a vigorous Separation Association had been founded. The principal grievance was the miserly allocation of revenue for public works in Port Phillip; a much needed bridge over the Yarra was long delayed, public highways were in shocking condition, there was no proper water supply and the first major public building was a massive gaol, more suited to the convict town of Sydney than the needs of Melbourne. Proceeds of crown land sales at Port Phillip were not spent on immigration to swell the labour force there but 'employed in supplying deficiencies in the revenue of the Sydney Government'. A part-elective Legislative Council was granted to New South Wales in 1843, and Port Phillip was allotted only six of the twenty-four elected members. It was an absurd measure, since few candidates could afford long periods in Sydney and they were easily outvoted when interests clashed. In 1844 the six representatives petitioned the Crown for separation, and in 1848 the colonists showed their contempt for absentee rule by electing [Earl Grey](#) to one of the positions.

La Trobe did not take the lead or campaign actively for separation, although he thought it 'the best thing that can, under the circumstances, happen to the district'. After 1847 he regarded agitation as unnecessary since Earl Grey had agreed to include separation in the reorganization plans which were being prepared for all the colonies. The Melbourne Town Council and the press, notably the *Argus*, led a fierce attack on La Trobe for failing to press Port Phillip's claims and needs strongly enough either in London or Sydney. He was specifically denounced for his attitude on the convict problem. On this matter public opinion was unfair. La Trobe strongly opposed the sending of convicts to Port Phillip and the proposed resumption of transportation, although he felt that 'exiles' might be acceptable and a useful addition to the always limited labour force and in 1844-49 was able to absorb several shiploads in the country districts. He showed his position clearly in 1849 when he refused to allow the *Randolph* to land its cargo of convicts at Port Phillip and sent the ship on to Sydney, thus defying the Colonial Office in response to a public outcry which was not likely to have stopped short of violence. For once La

Trobe was the hero of the colony, in contrast to the preceding year when the Town Council had petitioned London for his removal. Claiming that it was the only organ for the expression of public opinion the Town Council charged La Trobe with a number of rather vague and trivial sins: he did not keep up a state befitting his official position; he permitted systematic mismanagement of public money; he neglected public works; he was 'faithless and insincere' in his relations with councillors. It is clear that they felt that not enough attention and importance was paid to their position by La Trobe, and their petty allegations were dismissed by Earl Grey. It is also clear from the public meeting held to demand his recall that La Trobe did not have the trust of the Melbourne colonists. His isolation from the separation movement made him suspect on other aspects of Port Phillip interests.

Soon after his arrival La Trobe had to institute relief works for the unemployed and stave off a strike when the speculative land boom burst in 1841. Severe depression continued for several years, with squatters forced to boil down their sheep for tallow since they could neither feed nor sell them. Government revenue was correspondingly curtailed, so that new officials were not appointed and Port Phillip estimates were reduced.

For four months in 1846-47 La Trobe acted as lieutenant-governor of Van Diemen's Land after the peremptory dismissal of Sir John Eardley-Wilmot by Gladstone, then secretary of state for the colonies. It was a difficult situation with Eardley-Wilmot still in the colony, vainly demanding specific charges to which he could reply; he died in the colony, smeared by the vague accusations regarding his moral character which Gladstone had privately given as the reason for his dismissal but would not particularize. In this shameful, unjust episode, La Trobe behaved well; many years later he commented, 'it was good Service, and prudently and delicately performed'.

The Australian Colonies Government Act of 1850 gave Victoria its own representative government in a Legislative Council, two-thirds of whom were elected and one-third nominated. In January 1851 when La Trobe was appointed lieutenant-governor he had an Executive Council of four, nominated by the Crown, and could veto or reserve bills of the Council, control the Civil List and the proceeds from the sale of crown lands, and initiate all budgetary legislation. Thus La Trobe was given considerable power, full responsibility and a constitutional arrangement in which conflict was inherent. The Legislative Council of Victoria followed the pattern of its counterpart in New South Wales in demanding greater powers. There were few able men from whom La Trobe could choose his executive and his council spokesmen. Only William Lonsdale, first police magistrate of the district, was available to act as colonial secretary, a post for which he was not fitted. William Foster Stawell was appointed attorney-general, Alistair MacKenzie colonial treasurer and James Cassell collector of customs. The people concerned in government, elected and government men alike, and the governor himself, were completely inexperienced in the new form of legislature or of politics, yet in their first year of office they had to cope with unprecedented crises.

In August 1851 La Trobe reported the discovery of gold at Ballarat. The government soon had to extend its rule over a wide area. Thousands of diggers were concentrated in places such as Ballarat, Omeo, Bendigo, hitherto isolated and the haunt only of sheep, cattle or kangaroos. Public works and land surveys ceased and police dwindled to a handful, but men had to be found to control the ever-shifting goldfield centres. La Trobe raised wages by half to keep his public servants, pleaded for military reinforcements to maintain order and men-of-war to protect the colony, and recruited commissioners to take charge of the fields. Almost every man in the colony

went to the diggings at some time; La Trobe alienated most of them by following New South Wales in imposing a direct tax, the monthly licence fee to search for gold. It was ridiculous enough to attempt to collect the fee in September and October 1851 when few diggers could yet cover their expenses and when the government was unable to enforce its collection. It was a disastrous folly for La Trobe to raise the monthly fee to £3 from January 1852; well-organized and unified protest by the diggers and the press led to humiliating surrender by the government within a fortnight. La Trobe may have been persuaded by Stawell to raise the fee; certainly he was in urgent need of finance to pay the extra public service wages he had promised.

The Executive Council's attempt to control the goldfields and goldfields revenue led to friction with the Legislative Council, which refused to vote from the ordinary revenue any moneys for purposes arising from the discovery of gold. Ever timid in his relations with the Colonial Office, La Trobe did not take full responsibility himself in this crisis as a more experienced governor may have done, but waited for permission to give control of the goldfield portions of crown land and their revenue to the Legislative Council. Until this permission was received in September 1852 La Trobe was harried by hostile councillors, and he antagonized diggers by the imposition of direct taxation which bore no relation to ability to pay and which yielded no funds for amenities or services. He realized the disadvantages of a licence fee and preferred an export duty on gold. By the time such a duty could be substituted in September 1852, the Legislative Council was unwilling to do so and must thus bear the responsibility for later troubles.

By mid-1852 La Trobe's government was in full control again, albeit with a largely incompetent and corrupt police force. However, roads to the major fields had not been built and no provision had been made for the thousands of immigrants who were arriving from overseas, and no wharves were constructed to take the goods brought by the hundreds of ships soon to fill the harbour. It is possible that La Trobe underestimated the magnitude of the discoveries, the staying power of their attraction, or the amount of revenue they would bring. His hands were full with the problem of establishing control. Crime increased greatly as Vandiemonians flocked into Victoria, uniting the citizens in a further attack on convicts and transportation. The council passed a harsh convicts' prevention bill and although it was clearly illegal La Trobe assented to it, thereby showing courage and an awareness of the strength of colonial opinion, and risking 'his office, his character and his prospects in Downing Street'.

On the vital land question La Trobe was also attuned to colonial feeling and may well have been influenced by Gipps's view. Leases under the 1847 Order in Council were never issued, since surveys of runs had hardly begun when gold was discovered. Soon the increased demand for farming land made it necessary to throw open some of the squatters' land for sale. La Trobe was anxious to anticipate 'the prospective wants of the community' by reserving land for agriculture but the weight of legal opinion was against him. The council became a battleground of the radical and urban forces against the squatters; when the issue came to a head in August 1852 La Trobe temporized. He referred the question to the Colonial Office, recommending that squatters be secured in their tenure only where the land was not wanted for purchase. Until a decision arrived La Trobe continued to reserve land for future sale in the pastoral areas and allowed squatters to buy their homestead blocks. It was a wise and fair decision, but La Trobe's delay in bringing small sections near the goldfields forward for sale aroused strong hostility from the diggers, who objected also to the high prices the blocks brought at auction.

By the end of 1853 both councils were becoming more competent and more co-operative in their duties. More efficient administrators were improving government activity and the Legislative Council had been given more power and responsibility. Public works had at last been put in hand, though with much wastefulness, inefficiency and expense. Financial returns from land sales and goldfields were declining by the end of the year but La Trobe had forgotten Gipps's dictum about keeping his government out of debt; he allowed the council to budget for a deficit so that a financial crisis loomed for his successor. Later he wrote, 'None can know how difficult [was the period 1851-52] but those who were in that fierce struggle for the maintenance of order under so many disadvantages'. Despite blunders and great difficulties during these times he made a profound achievement in keeping government functioning and in maintaining the rule of law. Eventually he coped with the immense and rapid physical and numerical expansion of his colony. The criticisms that must be made of him, his tardiness in providing for the onslaught and spread of population, his lack of initiative on the issues of goldfields control and licence fees, were due to his inexperience and continuing self-doubt as to his ability.

In December 1852 La Trobe had submitted his resignation but was not relieved until 1854; he sailed for England on 6 May. He was appointed C.B. in November 1858 and in 1865 was awarded a pension of £333. Sophie La Trobe was in ill health during their last years in Victoria and preceded her husband to Europe, where she died at her family home on 30 January 1854. On 3 October 1855 La Trobe married her widowed sister, Rose Isabelle de Meuron, thus excluding himself from another official appointment had he wanted one. Towards the end of his life his sight failed and he was unable to write the account of his Australian experience which he had planned under the title 'A Colonial Governor'. He died in England on 4 December 1875 and was buried at Litlington, near Eastbourne, Sussex, in the churchyard close to his last home, Clapham House. He left a son and three daughters by his first wife and two daughters by his second. His personal estate, coming mainly from the subdivision of his property in Melbourne, amounted to £15,905. His widow retired to Switzerland, where a small church, the Chapelle de l'Hermitage, was built as a memorial to La Trobe.

In his first speech in Melbourne La Trobe declared, 'It is not by individual aggrandisement, by the possession of numerous flocks or 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'. His active dedication to these values, in a society motivated almost entirely by materialistic acquisition, left a heritage and an influence which benefited future generations. La Trobe was an active supporter of the religious, cultural and educational institutions, often initiating their existence and straining his limited income for their benefit. **It is he whom Melbourne must thank for its magnificent Botanic Gardens, and he gave leadership, prestige and support to the formation of the Mechanics' Institute, Royal Melbourne Hospital, the Benevolent Asylum, the Royal Philharmonic, the University of Melbourne.**

Charles Joseph Latrobe was the nephew of the famous architect Benjamin Latrobe.

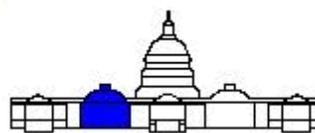
Born: May 1, 1764, near Leeds, England

Died: September 3, 1820, New Orleans, Louisiana

Hired by President Thomas Jefferson, March 6, 1803; construction halted by July 1, 1811

Hired by President James Madison, April 6, 1815

Resigned November 20, 1817



Latrobe constructed the Capitol's south wing (shown in blue) as well as rebuilding the interior of the north wing.

B. Henry Latrobe was hired by President Jefferson in 1803 to fill the position of "Surveyor of Public Buildings," with the principal responsibility of constructing the Capitol's south wing. He was also responsible for work at the President's House and the Navy Yard. After the south wing was completed in 1807 Latrobe began reconstructing the interior of the north wing. Construction funds were withheld after 1810, and Latrobe's public employment came to an end. After the two wings were damaged by fires set by British troops in 1814, Latrobe was hired to oversee restoration. During this period he worked only on the Capitol and had no responsibilities for other government buildings. Latrobe's employment contract was signed with the commissioners on April 18, 1815, and he resigned on November 20, 1817. He left at the Capitol some of the greatest interiors in the history of neoclassicism in America, including the Hall of the House (now [National Statuary Hall](#)), the [Old Senate Chamber](#), and the [Old Supreme Court Chamber](#).

Born in 1764 near Leeds, England, Latrobe studied architecture under Samuel Pepys Cockerell and engineering under John Smeaton. He emigrated in 1796 and began his American career in Virginia before settling in Philadelphia. There he designed the Bank of Pennsylvania, the first neoclassical building in the United States to display a Grecian order. In 1820 he died in New Orleans, where he had gone to build the city's municipal water system.

Select Bibliography

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