

'Qui la cerca la trôba', 'Qui la cherche la trouve', 'Who seeks will find'.

The La Trobe name has its origins in Occitan, the language of the inhabitants of Languedoc, the region in France to the east of Guyenne and to the north of Roussillon, with its capital in Toulouse. 'La Troba' was also the name applied to a troubadour, a romantic poet or minstrel, in the time before family names came generally into use in the mid-fifteenth century. It may have been that the founders of what is known today as the La Trobe family were, in fact, troubadours, but there is no way that this can be proven.¹ Since the 'cradle' of the Latrobe family is the tiny hamlet of Monbéqui, sixteen kilometres south of Montauban in Languedoc, it would seem logical for an ancestor whose nickname was 'La Troba' to assume this name as his own, once surnames became obligatory. Family names began to appear in the thirteenth century and were used only for male descendants, female children being identified by the addition of, firstly, their father's name and, upon marriage, by their husband's family name. The need for surnames arose first in larger cities and towns, and spread much later to residents of villages.

In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the spelling of any name was variable, whether it was a personal name or a place name. The name is spelt Latrobe in France and in the American branch of the family, while some Anglo-Saxon branches adopted the form La Trobe in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century. The Baltic branch whose forbear, John Frederic, was knighted by Tsar Alexander II, assumed the name de La Trobe.²

Although much in the way of historical detail can only be guessed at, what is certain is that the family had its origins in the area around Montauban, on the River Tarn, one of the three 'villes roses' of France, the others being Toulouse and Albi, so called because of the characteristic red brick which is a feature of most buildings in these cities. Montauban had been established by the Comtes de Toulouse as a centre of agriculture and of lucrative leather and wool industries.

The family was rather numerous and widespread, and there were most probably various branches. The name can be traced in church registers in or near Montauban in the villages of Villemur, Varennes, Verlhac, Monbéqui, Montech, Monbartier and other hamlets. The Latrobes were of the bourgeois

class, being notaries and property owners, as well as artisans and tradesmen in various fields: shoemakers, millers, masons, tanners and weavers.² As did so many of the population of the region in the sixteenth century, numerous members of the Latrobe family adopted the Reformed faith as taught by Calvin to replace a Catholicism they considered corrupt and unacceptable. The resulting conflict caused the persecution of French Protestants, or Huguenots, for almost two centuries.

Jean, or John, Latrobe may be considered the founder of the English branch of the La Trobe family. Soon after his birth in Villemur on 26 September 1670, he was baptised by the Protestant minister at the Reformed Church in the village of Verlhac.⁴ Very little is known of his background, but family tradition holds that he was well educated and that as a young man, he – like so many of his contemporaries – was forced by the religious persecution of the time to sever his family connections and to leave France. While many thousands of Protestants fled to Switzerland where a large French community was established, Jean became a soldier with the Dutch Protestant Prince William of Orange, and accompanied him to England where the Prince was invited to take the English throne in 1688. According to the tradition of the English branch of the Latrobe family, Jean had joined William's army in Holland.³ It is not surprising that Jean La Trobe should have been one of the 36,000 soldiers of various nationalities who crossed the Irish Sea in 1690 with William of Orange, determined to fight against Catholicism and despotism in the incarnation of James II and his forces. William of Orange had great confidence in the military skills, bravery and reliability of the French refugees who joined his forces. Jean was among those who fought and won with, now, William III in Ireland at the Battle of the Boyne River in 1690. His rank is unknown, but family tradition has it from a letter one hundred and forty years later from Frederick La Trobe to his brother, Christian Ignatius, that their great-grandfather had been an officer in William's army.⁴ Injured, he was shortly afterwards invalided out of the Army, and remained in Ireland.

A compatriot of the Huguenot leader Louis Crommelin, considered the founder of the Irish linen industry, Jean La Trobe soon established himself as a linen manufacturer in Waterford, a city which at this time encouraged artisans.

From his arrival in Waterford in 1690, Jean Latrobe had thus become involved in the newly-established linen industry which was vigorously encouraged by King William in this last decade of the seventeenth century, later to become known as 'the golden age of the Huguenots'.⁵ He was buried in the Huguenot Cemetery at St. Stephen's Green in Dublin in about 1766.

Jean was the father of three sons, the second of whom, James, was the great-grandfather of Charles Joseph La Trobe. A linen manufacturer and merchant

like his father, James, was brought up in his birthplace of Waterford as a Baptist. He was received into the Moravian (Protestant non-conformist) congregation in Dublin in 1750, following the conversion of his son, Benjamin. Benjamin's son, Christian Ignatius La Trobe, Charles Joseph's father, followed in the same tradition, becoming Secretary to the Unity of the Brethren in England in 1795,⁵ and raising his six children in the Moravian faith.

This was the family into which Charles Joseph La Trobe was born in London on 30 March 1801 'within the sound of Bow Bells'.⁶ After spending many of his early years 'rambling' in Switzerland, the Tyrol, North America and Mexico, accounts of which were published in four works from 1829-1836, he was sent by the Colonial Office in 1837 to report on educational facilities for the 700,000 recently released slaves in the British West Indies. The three reports which resulted were so well considered that he was offered in 1839 the position of Superintendent of the colony of Port Phillip. After separation from New South Wales in 1851, La Trobe was appointed first Lieutenant-Governor of Victoria, an office he held until his resignation and departure for England in 1854.

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NOTES

1 Pierre Latrobe, 'Le Patronyme', in *Les Latrobe dans le monde, 1462-1997. Proceedings of the Latrobe International Symposium*, May 1997, (Versailles: LIS, 1998), 28.

2 Pierre and Janine Latrobe, 'Deriving the family connections', (Rouen: 1999).

3 Pierre Latrobe, 'La famille Latrobe aux XVe et XVIe siècles', in *Les Latrobe dans le monde*, op. cit., 31-39, passim. John Henry de la Trobe, 'Histoire de Jean le Réfugié et de ses descendants, xviii et xixe siècles', in *Les Latrobe dans le monde*, op. cit., 82.

4 John Henry de La Trobe, 'Histoire de Jean le Réfugié et de ses descendants, XVIIIe siècles', *Les Latrobe dans le monde* op. cit. 82.

5 Ibid.

6 John Henry de La Trobe, 'Jean Latrobe in Ireland', (Hamburg, 1997), 3.

7 John Henry de La Trobe, 'Waterford', in *Notes on the Latrobe Family Genealogy*, (Hamburg: 1997), 3.

8 John Mason & Lucy Torode, 'Three Generations of the La Trobe family in the Moravian Church', (Newtownabbey, Ireland: *Moravian History Magazine*, 1997), 18.

9 Charles Joseph La Trobe, *The Rambler in North America*, 1832-33, 2 vols., (London: Seeley & Burnside, 1835), I, 7.

- 10 Charles Joseph La Trobe, *The Alpenstock*, (London: Seeley & Burnside, 1829).
- *The Pedestrian*, (London: Seeley & Burnside, 1832).
- *The Rambler in North America*, *op. cit.*
- *The Rambler in Mexico*, (London: Seeley & Burnside, 1836).

Charles Joseph La Trobe, *Landscapes and Sketches*
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Melbourne: State Library of Victoria: Tarcoola Press: National Trust
of Australia (Victoria), 1999. 341 p. col. Ill., 30 cm., index.
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328 Swanston Street, Melbourne. 3000. \$350, incl. Postage).