

# Media release

Friday 18 March 2016

## **Victoria's early history revealed through 'Letters to La Trobe' now available online**

Delicate hand written 19<sup>th</sup> century letters sent to Charles Joseph La Trobe are now available online for the very first time, providing a snapshot into the lives of early Victorians.

Director and Keeper of Public Records, Justine Heazlewood, said it took 18 passionate volunteers six years to digitise the 170 year old documents which are now online in time for the 215<sup>th</sup> anniversary of La Trobe's birthday.

"While Charles La Trobe served as Superintendent of Port Phillip District from 1839 to 1851, and Lieutenant-Governor of the colony of Victoria from 1851 to 1854, he helped create the city of Melbourne and oversaw Victoria's separation from NSW – the letters he received during this time paint a portrait of the people and their concerns of the day."

The letters to La Trobe range from suggestions for the establishment of Melbourne's streets, gardens and markets to the personal appeals and complaints of citizens.

In this letter, the Colonial Secretary sends approval for the establishment of the Melbourne Supreme Court:  
*"I am directed by the Governor to inform you, that a Bill will very shortly be laid before the Legislative Council, one of the Provisions of which will be to establish Courts of Justice at Melbourne."*

While in a more personal letter, a woman pleads for the release of her son from jail:  
*"The son of your petitioner is now confined in the gaol of this town for an offence committed in utter ignorance that any law was infringed by the act for which he is punished, he being only nineteen years of age and having been brought up in a simple and retired manner, so that his knowledge of the world is ever below his years."*

In a humorous exchange, this letter writer seeks reprimand for an incompetent lighthouse watcher:  
*"I beg leave to inform your Honor that the man attended to the light house, Daniel Hickey, has been frequently found asleep during his watch at night, and indeed very impertinent to both Mr McNaughton and myself."*

Diane Gardiner AM, President of the C.J. La Trobe Society, says that these records are significant to Victoria's memory.

"The digitised letters of Lt Governor Charles La Trobe show new details about his administration and give researchers an idea of the issues and difficulties he was dealing with. In this day of instant messaging, Twitter and telephones, imagine La Trobe's frustrations in waiting a month or more for answers and instructions regarding urgent matters."

'Letters to La Trobe' is a Public Record Office Victoria initiative supported by the CJ La Trobe Society with funding from the R E Ross Trust.

To access the 'Letters to La Trobe' visit **[prov.vic.gov.au](http://prov.vic.gov.au)**

Or view a sample of letters written during the development of Melbourne at the interactive gallery at **[google.com/culturalinstitute/browse/public record office victoria](http://google.com/culturalinstitute/browse/public%20record%20office%20victoria)**

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