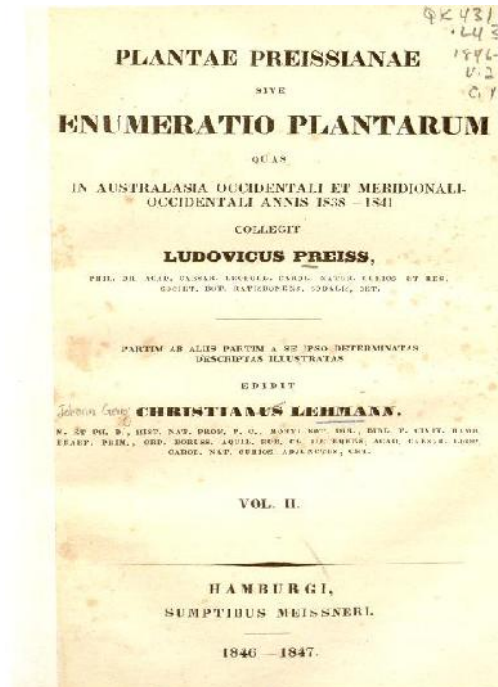


The Genus *Latrobea*

Charles Joseph La Trobe was a very keen botanist and collected plants on his travels around the world. A number of Australian plants were named after him and eventually a genus was named in his honour. But why was a Western Australian plant named in his honour, especially since we know he never travelled to the West and it did not grow in Victoria?

La Trobe sent his specimens to the Swiss botanist Carl Daniel Friedrich Meisner (1800-1874) who was a prominent European Professor of Botany for 40 years at Basel University. Meisner was a prolific author in German and he had a good understanding of Latin, which is essential in describing new species since it is the international language of science. He collected plants between 1830 and 1868 and published many books during his life time, such as *Plantarum Vascularium Genera* (1836-1843) and *Lateinische Phraselogie* (Latin Phrase Book, 1886).

Between 1838 and 1841 a German botanist named Ludwig Preiss (Johann August Ludwig Preiss, 1811-1883) was in Western Australia collecting plants. He produced two volumes of *Plantae Pressianae*: the first volume in 1844, where on page 73 two plants described by Meisner were known as *Pultenaea brunonis* and *P. genistoides*. The second volume was published in 1847, where on page 219 *Pultenaea brunonis* and *P. genistoides* were reclassified by Meisner and became known as *Latrobea brunonis* and *L. genistoides*.



Naming the Genus



Latrobea brunonis

The plants that Preiss had collected were sent to Europe to Christian Lehmann (Johann Georg Christian Lehmann, 1792-1860) a German botanist of Hamburg who arranged for their distribution to other botanists to be described and published. Meisner was given the legumes in the Fabaceae family (renamed in 1836, originally named Papilionaceae family in 1792). As stated above, Meisner had previously described *Pultenaea brunonis*, which had been collected by artist Ferdinand Bauer on his trip with Flinders in 1801 and was described by George Bentham, the English botanist, in 1837. In 1848 Meisner had another look at the Papilionaceae family because he had received some specimens from south-western

Western Australia from James Drummond who was a resident collector. He compared the two species (*Pultenaea brunonis* and *P. genistoides*) with other samples in the *Pultenaea* genus and realised these two specimens were different; and since there was no other genus they could be placed in he decided to describe a new one. He decided to call it *Latrobea* 'named in honor of La Trobe, governor of the colony at Port Phillip, because of his strenuous exploration for unknown plants'. (*Plantae Preissianae* Vol 2, p.219). He was aware of La Trobe's extensive exploration of the Port Phillip District, later to become the State of Victoria, and his discovery of many new plants.

A Puzzling Question

We do not know when La Trobe started sending his specimens to Meisner, but we do know that during his time in Australia that is where he sent them. Why La Trobe sent his specimens to Carl Meisner and not to the famous English botanists of the time, Joseph Dalton Hooker (1817-1991) or George Bentham CMG FRS (1800-1884), is difficult to say. We know that he was interested in botany long before he arrived in Australia: author John Barnes, for instance, writes 'His flower-loving friend Mr. Studer of Erlenbach, for whom he brought back dried plants from America, shared his interest in botany and mountain-climbing'. (*The La Trobe Journal*, No.71, 2003, p.46).



Latrobea genistoides

Maybe Mr. Studer or another like-minded friend knew Carl Meisner, or perhaps La Trobe's Swiss-born wife Sophie's family, the de Montmollins, or his patrons the de Pourtales

family had connections with him. It is quite possible that Charles may have met Meisner in this way. Also, it would have been much easier and quicker when he was in Switzerland for him to send specimens to Meisner rather than on a long trip to England, where their safe arrival was not always guaranteed. And when he was in Australia he would have been just keeping up this relationship. The other reason may be that La Trobe knew that Meisner was interested in Australian plants. Meisner described hundreds of species of Australian plants including Proteaceae, Fabaceae, Mimosaceae and Myrtaceae. His collection is in the New York Herbarium at the New York Botanical Garden, but is not catalogued.

While it is only conjecture why Charles La Trobe sent his specimens to Carl Meisner, we do know that Meisner named the genus after La Trobe to recognise his contribution to the discovery of new species in the new and amazing continent of Australia.

Known Plants in the Genus

Family Fabaceae alt. Papilionaceae:

- Latrobea abnormis* (F. Muell.) Base name *Daviesia abnormis* (F. Muell.)
- Latrobea brunonis* (Benth.) Base name *Pultenaea brunonis* (Benth.) Meisn.
- Latrobea diosmifolia* (Benth.) Base name *Brutonia diosmifolia*
- Latrobea diosmifolia* var. *diosmifolia* (Benth.)
- Latrobea diosmifolia* var. *glabrescens* (Benth.)
- Latrobea genistoides* (Meisn.) Base name *Pultenaea genistoides* (Meisn.)
- Latrobea hirtella* Base name *Leptocytisus hirtellus* (Turcz.) Benth.
- Latrobea tenella* (Meisn.) Base name *Burtonia tenella* (Meisn.)
- Latrobea tenella* var. *grandiflora* (Benth.)
- Latrobea tenella* (Meisn.) Benth. var. *tenella*

Other species:

- Acacia acinacea* syn. *Acacia latrobei* (Lindl.) (Meisn)
- Correa lawrenceana* var. *latrobeana* syn. *Correa latrobeana* (F.Muell.)
- Eremophila latrobei* (F.Muell.)
- Grevillea rosmarinifolia* subspecies *rosmarinifolia* syn. *G. latrobea* (Meisn.)
- Glycine latrobeana* (Benth.)
- Pandorea pandorana* syn. *Tecoma australis* syn. *Tecoma latrobei* (F.Muell.)

Due to the genus *Latrobea* being a Western Australian plant, the Friends of La Trobe's Cottage have been unable to source any seed, so unfortunately we are not growing any in our garden.

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Images

Latrobea brunonis, Centre for Australian National Biodiversity Research

<http://www.anbg.gov.au/cpbr/cd-keys/>

This image is from The Pea Key.

Latrobea genistoides, Photographer: Colin Woolcock

Albany, Western Australia 1972

Source: State Botanical Collection, Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne.

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