

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 his friend Pastor Studer in Erlenbach, Switzerland, who passed many of them on to the Swiss botanist Carl Daniel Friedrich Meissner (1800-1874), a prominent European Professor of Botany for 40 years at Basel University. Meissner 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 Meissner 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 Meissner and became known as *Latrobea brunonis* and *L. genistoides*.



Naming the Genus



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. Meissner was given the legumes in the Fabaceae family (renamed in 1836, originally named Papilionaceae family in 1792). As stated above, Meissner 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 Meissner 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.



Meissner 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. He named the genus after La Trobe to recognise his contribution to the discovery of new species in the new and amazing continent of Australia.

Latrobea genistoides

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 *Burtonia 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 latrobei* (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.

References

Preiss, Ludwig (Lehman, Christian, editor), *Plantae Preissianae sive enumeratio plantarum: quas in Australasia Occidentali et meridionali-occidentali annis 1838-1841*, Vol I, Hamburgi, Scemptibus Meissneri, 1844-1845, p.73. www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/9227#page/5/mode/1up

Preiss, Ludwig (Lehman, Christian, editor), *Plantae Preissianae sive enumeratio plantarum: quas in Australasia Occidentali et meridionali-occidentali annis 1838-1841*, Vol II, Hamburgi, Scemptibus Meissneri, 1846-1847, p.219. www.biodiversitylibrary.org/page/499040#page/1/mode/1up

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.

Acknowledgements

Dr Josephine Milne
Manager, Collections
National Herbarium of Victoria (MEL)
Royal Botanic Gardens.

Dr Dan Murphy
National Herbarium of Victoria (MEL)
Royal Botanic Gardens.

Dr Terry Macfarlane
Senior Research Scientist
Western Australian Herbarium.

Cheryl Backhouse
Manager, Australian Plant Image Index
Australian National Botanic Gardens.

Sally Stewart, Librarian
Royal Botanic Gardens, Melbourne.

Dr James Solomon
Curator of the Herbarium
Missouri Botanical Garden.

SP 20/10/2013 rev.