CHAPTER FOUR

“I IS DONE: NO MORE”: THE FIRST CONVERTS

The 1860s heralded a new beginning for the Moravians in Australia. This chapter will examine their renewed work in the Colony of Victoria. It will follow the establishment of the Ebenezer mission station in north-west Victoria, as well as the subsequent establishment of the Ramahyuck mission station in Gippsland, in the east of the colony. At these new mission stations, the hierarchy to which the missionaries ascribed remained intact. Thus, they continued to deem their religious and spiritual knowledge, usages of land, and family interactions superior to those of the Aboriginal people amongst whom they worked. Through their continuing personal engagement with Aboriginal people, however, some of the assumptions that they had arrived with were challenged. This chapter will examine how the missionaries expanded their sphere of influence within the colony in the wake of the failed Lake Boga attempt.

The establishment of Ebenezer

On the 14th of May, 1858, Friedrich Wilhelm Spieseke and Friedrich August Hagenauer set foot upon Melbourne soil after a 78-day ocean voyage on the Black Swan and seven days in quarantine. Amongst their possessions they each had a copy of the Instructions to guide them in their work, and a letter of introduction intended for Henry Barkly, the Governor of the Colony. The author of the letter was the Secretary of the Moravian Church in England, Peter La Trobe, whom the missionaries had met prior to sailing out from England. During their time in England, they also met Peter’s younger brother, Charles Joseph, who had been the first Governor of the Colony of Victoria and was known to Spieseke from his previous work in the colony. The letter of

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1 Missionsblatt, 1858, 10, 194-197.
2 PMD, 30 December 1857, #10b, 120.
3 PUAC, 7 January 1858, #7, 16.
introduction to Barkly was handed to him personally a few days after
the missionaries’ arrival. Barkly was notionally supportive of the
Moravians’ aims, yet dismissive of them personally. He stated that they:
“were as helpless as children and would have stayed in Melbourne had
the Bishop not have sent them away.” The missionaries, for their part,
knew that they could not place as much trust in Barkly as they could in
his predecessor and their friend, Charles Joseph La Trobe. This was
deeded especially so since Barkly’s Chief Secretary was a Catholic.
Although caution was exercised on both sides, the missionaries found
more enthusiastic support for their work amongst other friends,
including the Church of England’s S.L. Chase. In their first few weeks
in the colony, they often visited him, as well as others thought to be of
importance for their work.

At the end of the 1850s, the effects of the Victorian gold rush, which
had severely disrupted the functioning of the previous Moravian mis-
sion attempt at Lake Boga, were still apparent. The missionaries were
approached to preach to the diggers on the gold-fields, who, it was sug-
gested, would benefit from the Christian word. Unlike the Goßner
missionaries at Moreton Bay (see Chapter Two) however, who changed
their goal and preached to Europeans, the Moravians were steadfast in
their commitment to work amongst the ‘heathen’ Aborigines, and
deprecated this offer.

A month after they arrived in Melbourne, the two men journeyed
140 kilometres north-west to Ballarat, the largest inland town in the
colony (see Figure 1), which had been made populous and wealthy by
the gold rush. There they met with a Crown Lands Commissioner,
Mr Wright, who promised them all of his support in obtaining a mis-
sion station in the Wimmera. Barkly had suggested the Wimmera dis-
trict, as there were still a number of Aborigines living there and the
area was not as densely populated by Europeans as other areas of the
colony. The missionaries travelled further west to Mount William,
which lay in a mountain range named after the Grampian Mountains
in Scotland, to Mr Archibald Macarthur Campbell’s station. Campbell,
who had been the owner of the Gannawarra station near Lake Boga,
was overjoyed to see Spieseke again. He had wanted the missionaries

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4 PUAC, 3 September 1859, #5, 205.
5 Missionsblatt, 1858, 10, 195.
6 Barkly (Melbourne) to Peter La Trobe (London), 23 June 1857, AAV, MF 165.