

## GOLDEN FAITH: THE FORMATION OF HEBREW CONGREGATIONS ON THE BENDIGO AND BALLARAT GOLDFIELDS

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### ABSTRACT

As the rush for gold captivated the world in the mid-nineteenth century, migrants from all over the world sailed and settled on Victoria's booming goldfields. For the migrants travelling to Ballarat and Bendigo, they would bring with them more than just clothes and furniture. Jewish migrants and settlers brought their faith. As gold was unearthed, Judaism was planted, finding a home on these fields of gold which would endure into the next century and beyond. But who were the Jews on the early goldfields? How did these goldfields Hebrew congregations begin?

### KEYWORDS

Gold Rush Victoria,  
Congregations Victoria  
Ballarat, Congregations  
Victoria Bendigo,  
Goldfields, Women

### Introduction

The mid-nineteenth century saw the world struck with a spreading sickness: gold fever. The newspapers published the discovery of great gold finds in California and later the colonies of Victoria and New South Wales. Stories of poor men becoming rich swiftly circulated among people, and were repeated again and again at hotel bars, dining tables, and on corner streets. Gold in the Port Phillip district, the original name of Victoria, had been a well-known secret from the 1840s, with many Melbourne jewellers and 'proto-diggers' aware of the hidden riches.<sup>1</sup> It was, however, the California gold rushes and their widespread reportage which had

ignited gold fever, spurring the gold rush to Victoria. The rush for gold transformed the Victorian colony. The 1850s saw sweeping changes occur within a short amount of time, as the massive influx of migrants more than tripled Victoria's population and led to social, economic, and civil changes. The flood of migrants also affected the colony's religious groups, boosting small minority faiths and communities. The migration that accompanied the gold rushes dramatically increased the Jewish population, which led to the creation of new communities across the colony. On the largest of Victoria's goldfields, new and surprisingly large Jewish communities formed. In Ballarat and Sandhurst (which would later change its name to Bendigo), two new Jewish communities formed as a direct result of the gold rushes. But who were the Jews who made the long journey by sail to these golden shores, who trekked the muddy, half-formed roads to the Central Victorian goldfields?

### **Who were the goldfields Jews?**

Jews on the early goldfields engaged in a range of employment and were from a diverse background of nationalities although a significant proportion tended to be employed in trade and were of British extraction. Some Jews on the Central Victorian goldfields had migrated from Central or Eastern Europe, mainly from Prussia or Poland.<sup>2</sup> A significant number were British, having either grown up in England or spent considerable time there.<sup>3</sup>

On the early Central Victorian goldfields, Jews worked in a range of occupations. While there certainly were some who prospected for gold, such as Benjamin Farjeon, Jewish miners seem to have been few in number and quickly moved to other employment, or, having never turned to digging, worked at trades learnt overseas and established businesses. Hermann Deutsch, born in Gleiwitz in Upper Silesia, Prussia in about 1832, arrived on the Ballarat goldfields sometime in 1858, where he worked as a lithographer and engraver.<sup>4</sup> No Jewish miner may have earned his fortune from digging gold in the 1850s; however, the gold rushes

added bullion-exporting and gold-buying to their repertoire of trades, often in conjunction with storekeeping or as tobacconists. Some even handled famous gold nuggets. In Ballarat, the Wittkowski brothers operated a tobacconist store which also bought gold from local miners.<sup>5</sup> When the Welcome Nugget, a monster lump of gold which weighed over 70 kilograms, was discovered in 1858 at Bakery Hill, Ballarat, it quickly became an attraction for locals who posed for photos with the nugget.<sup>6</sup> The Welcome Nugget was purchased by the Wittkowski brothers who shortly afterwards toured the colony to display it.<sup>7</sup>

The paid employment of Jews living on the Central Victorian goldfields complies with Charles Price's statistics; a large percentage tended to be either skilled workers, dealers, or workers in what Price termed 'catering', which included fruiterers, butchers, bakers, grocers, café-keepers, storekeepers undefined, and tobacconists.<sup>8</sup> When Abraham Abrahamsohn, a German Jew, became tired of mining, he built his own oven and operated a small bakery. Abrahamsohn had documented numerous encounters with the local Aboriginal population to whom he had 'several times given some of [his] scanty store of bread and meat and a drink from [his] bottle of whisky, so necessary in this swamp'.<sup>9</sup> After amassing a small fortune, Abrahamsohn became homesick and returned to his family in Germany.<sup>10</sup> The local newspapers of Bendigo and Ballarat also indicate that jewellers, watchmakers, publicans, and pawnbrokers were popular occupations among goldfield Jews.<sup>11</sup> While storekeepers and dealers with heavy loads had followed many of the diggers to the goldfields to set up businesses, operating a store on the early goldfields proved challenging. Moving stock through half-formed roads was risky and slow, while new discoveries of gold elsewhere could quickly leave the goldfield deserted. Despite the difficulties, trading was a popular occupation among goldfield Jews but success varied. While some gained a fortune through trading, others became insolvent. As Hilary Rubinstein noted, between 1853-73 an estimated 265 Jews declared insolvency in the Victorian colony, mainly after 1857.<sup>12</sup>

Not all insolvents were in business. After selling his business in 1865, Hermann Deutsch invested in mining, which initially proved successful, however, after three years he experienced heavy losses, and eventually became insolvent.<sup>13</sup> With a noticeable commercial presence on the goldfields, what may have been less obvious to Gentile contemporaries was the extended network of Jewish kin who resided either on the goldfields or in nearby areas.

Jews on the Central Victorian goldfields did not reside alone and were often followed by extensive kin groups. Siblings, uncles, cousins, or even parents followed migrants to the goldfields to set up businesses and homes. A growing body of evidence suggests that there were substantial familial relationships on the goldfields, ones which people could draw upon in times of distress.<sup>14</sup> Scholarly research undertaken by Charles Fahey and Alan Mayne into diaries, material culture, oral traditions, and genealogical links on the goldfields has uncovered the 'wealth of family bonds even in the most unsettled days of the alluvial diggings'.<sup>15</sup> The movement of whole family groups to Bendigo and Ballarat in the earliest days was atypical but did occur. After the death of his wife, Isaac Crawcour sailed and temporarily settled on the Ballarat goldfields with his two daughters and seven sons. Crawcour opened a tobacconist business in Ballarat; however, his sons would quickly establish businesses of their own in neighbouring districts, creating an extensive network in which aid, money, and assistance travelled along. When Isaac's daughter Rebecca and her husband experienced financial difficulties, it was this extensive network which they drew from for support.<sup>16</sup>

The Jewish cemetery records available for the 1850s and 1860s in both Ballarat and Bendigo show a number of burials of children under five years of age, indicating that there were Jewish family groups present. Ballarat displayed a higher number of children's burials in the Jewish section than Bendigo, possibly indicating that Jewish families were more likely to settle in Ballarat than Bendigo. This may have been due to distance.

Ballarat was located closer to Melbourne, and therefore easier for families who had infants or a large number of children to reach. It was more common for an individual or for pairs to first migrate, then for other family members to make the journey later. On the early goldfields, kinship ties tended to be along male lines, as the imbalance of the sexes shows. While Price identified 163 Jewish men in Ballarat in 1861, Jewish women numbered only 78.<sup>17</sup> A similar disparity existed in Bendigo, which had 140 men and 68 women in 1861.<sup>18</sup> While Jewish women were less likely to travel to the goldfields than Jewish men in the 1850s, there were female relatives who journeyed to the goldfields, mainly young single daughters or sisters. Julia Solomon, born in western Poland in 1836, first travelled to London before she made the longer journey to join her brothers who had set up a business in Ballarat in 1861.<sup>19</sup> Shortly after her arrival, Julia married Jacob Bernstein.<sup>20</sup> The goldfields not only provided men with the opportunity to gain riches, but also for unmarried sisters or daughters to form families. The migration of single female relatives to the goldfields further extended and consolidated the family networks which had emerged across not only the goldfields but across the Victorian colony more generally. While a number of women did sail and settle on the early goldfields, they remained only a small proportion of the population.

Women on the goldfields did progressively increase in number; however, they were a minority on the goldfields until the 1870s. In 1857, the ratio of women to men was 43:100 but this ratio would improve in 1861 to 56:100.<sup>21</sup> The smaller number of women on the early goldfields was seen to be a result of the camp environment. The rough goldfields were perceived as lacking the urban comforts of established towns, which were preferable for women and children.<sup>22</sup> For those awaiting their husbands in town, what awaited was not comfort but hardship. The wives who remained behind often needed to seek paid employment to support themselves and their families in the absence of a male breadwinner, sending some families into increasing poverty.<sup>23</sup>

Life for women on the early goldfields was not any easier, with some taking up paid employment or starting small businesses. Ann and Elizabeth Moses, two Jewish sisters born in Hertfordshire, England, migrated to Australia in 1854 on board Caroline Chisholm's emigration ship.<sup>24</sup> Once the sisters arrived in the Victorian colony, they soon opened a store on the road to the Ballarat goldfields, an unusual occupation for two single women but not unheard of. There was a small percentage of women who were in 1854 turning their hand to storekeeping.<sup>25</sup>

The number of women in paid employment on the Ballarat goldfields in 1854 was only 6.79 per cent of the total amount of women present; however, this number doubled by 1857 to 13.74 per cent.<sup>26</sup> Women who had experienced the uncertainty which often accompanied prospecting husbands, or other male kin, had to seek employment, working either in refreshment houses, as servants, nurses, teachers, or even taking in needlework and washing.<sup>27</sup> The labour of women and children on the goldfields, especially the work carried out by married women, was usually subsumed under adult male labour, meaning that the number of women who engaged in some form of work was likely to be higher than the above statistics.<sup>28</sup> Some Jewish traders, as did their Gentile competitors and neighbours, resided at their stores, living either adjoining or above their store premises. This meant that family members were often present or at least nearby to aid in the operation of the business. For the wives and children of small business owners their labour could be significant, helping to tend the shop or run errands.<sup>29</sup> As Jewish men and women were creating homes and businesses on the goldfields, their thoughts quickly turned to their faith. Within a short amount of time, synagogues were built on the Central Victorian Goldfields and organised Jewish congregations had emerged.

### **The formation of Jewish congregations**

As Jews settled on the Bendigo and Ballarat goldfields, they had also begun to gather together as an organised faith community.

Either meeting in hotel dining rooms or in shops, Jews gathered together for worship, prayer, and like-minded company. Their thoughts quickly turned to the building of synagogues. Located on the periphery of the British Empire, the congregations which formed in Bendigo and Ballarat would connect and align themselves to a growing international Jewish community. As Ava F. Kahn and Adam D. Mendelsohn noted in their introduction to *Transnational Traditions*, Jews were 'a people whose traditions, identity, sense of solidarity, and commercial, social, and religious connections crossed borders, regions, and even oceans'.<sup>30</sup> The distance between the Jewish communities of the Old World and the new colonies, between people, institutions, and leaders, resulted in the synagogue assuming multiple functions.<sup>31</sup> For the Jewish communities which formed on distant goldfields, the synagogue became the central point in Jewish life.

### **Bendigo**

The beginning of the Bendigo Hebrew Congregation presents modern historians with something of a mystery. The date for when an organised Jewish community formed in Bendigo is unknown; however, evidence has shown that it developed at an incredibly early date. The advertisements placed in the local newspaper the *Bendigo Advertiser* indicate that a Jewish community formed before 1855. On 24 January 1855 calls were made for a general meeting of Jewish persons, suggesting a community and even a Jewish committee had been established and functioning for some time before 1855.<sup>32</sup> In 1891, George Mackay published a history of Bendigo in which he placed the earliest assembly of the Jewish residents for public worship as 1854.<sup>33</sup> Despite this, no notices were found in the later issues of the local newspapers published in 1854, which included issues printed in September and October when significant Jewish holidays occurred. The best, and most accurate, date we can give for the formation of an organised Jewish community is before 1855. By this estimated date, however, the Bendigo Jewish community were taking some

significant steps towards consolidating the place of the Jewish congregation in the local townscape.

By the end of 1855, the Bendigo Jewish community had begun to build its first synagogue. Late in November 1855, calls for tenders were placed in the *Bendigo Advertiser* for the construction of a weatherboard building to be used by the Jewish community.<sup>34</sup> Builders had a week to place a tender and could see the specifications for the building at the offices of Messrs. Moore and Co. in Pall Mall.<sup>35</sup> While the weatherboard synagogue was being built, community meetings continued, though they seem to have been sporadic. The next meeting was held early in 1856 to elect officers and to discuss other business needs.<sup>36</sup> It is likely that officers were elected on a yearly or even on a half yearly basis, as can be seen in other Jewish congregations which had formed in Victoria at a similar time.<sup>37</sup>

The officers of the Bendigo synagogue were David Heckscher, Israel Moses, and Joseph Josephs.<sup>38</sup> David Meyer Heckscher had previously aided the Jewish community in Tasmania to establish a synagogue. He was born in Jutland, Denmark in 1805 where he had undertaken an apprenticeship as a watchmaker.<sup>39</sup> After his apprenticeship, he travelled to Russia and then finally to England. In 1833, Heckscher left London and sailed to Hobart with his wife and family. Once he arrived, he established a successful business as a watchmaker and became involved with the Jewish community which formed, contributing towards the building of a local synagogue. Upon receiving news of the California gold rush in 1848, Heckscher left Hobart to try his luck on this new goldfield. His trip, however, proved a failure. He did not remain in America long, instead returning to Australia after a few years to try the Bendigo diggings. Heckscher first mined for gold and was incredibly successful; within three months it was estimated that he had unearthed 16 lbs of gold.<sup>40</sup> He soon opened a store and a hotel, the Albert Hotel, in Bendigo with both businesses proving successful. It seems that by the end of July 1856 Heckscher's position of trustee of the synagogue had been passed on to Morris Samuel,



who was related to Heckscher.<sup>41</sup> David did not remain an officer of the Bendigo synagogue for long. In 1858 his business partnerships were dissolved by mutual consent and he began to sell off his property, including the Albert Hotel.<sup>42</sup> He soon afterwards removed to Prahran in Melbourne.<sup>43</sup> Before passing this position onto Samuel, the Bendigo synagogue was completed and opened with a magnificent service.

Construction of Bendigo's synagogue moved quickly, with the weatherboard synagogue completed by the middle of 1856. On Sunday 13 July 1856, the synagogue, located in Dowling Street, was opened with a ceremony taking place to mark this momentous occasion. During the opening service, the officers of the synagogue, Moses, Heckscher, and Josephs walked three times around the synagogue carrying the Tablets of the Law. Moses also gave a moving address, claiming the synagogue was not only 'a temple of prayer, but ... a schools [*sic*], to teach us our duties as a portion of the great family of mankind'.<sup>44</sup> While Moses' address focused on the local community, it also held an international dimension, referring to 'our nation' as the Jewish people and acknowledging a connection to 'our native England' and his co-religionists in Europe.<sup>45</sup> From its very earliest beginnings, the Bendigo Hebrew Congregation had connected and aligned itself to an international Jewish community as well as to Britain. Bendigo Jews would continue to display a keen interest in world Jewry, one which extended beyond the Anglophone Jewish world to include Jerusalem and Europe. A choir, led by Mr Solomon, was organised for the ceremony with Messrs. Samuels, Davis, Farjeon, Woolf, and Valentine organised to sing Hebrew sacred music.<sup>46</sup>

Hebrew congregations in the Victorian colony were introducing increasingly Anglo elements of worship into services. This had followed from the approval of Nathan Adler, the Chief Rabbi of the British Empire, and were usually first introduced into bigger Hebrew congregations located in Melbourne before they were integrated into the services of smaller synagogues. The

Melbourne Hebrew Congregation, Shearith Yisrael, Remnant of Israel, opened the way for smaller congregations such as those in Bendigo and Ballarat to introduce traditionally Anglo practices. According to reports in the local contemporary newspaper, the opening of the Melbourne synagogue in the late 1840s included a 'choir [which] chaunted' and offered prayers in 'both Hebrew and English.'<sup>47</sup> The Hebrew congregations in Ballarat and Bendigo may have introduced elements such as a choir or the vernacular language into their synagogue services, but they continued to identify with Judaism and international Jewry. The Ballarat and Bendigo Hebrew congregations were not just part of one community, but were part of many, and this can help us to understand how and why these traditionally Anglo elements were introduced.

As well as being members of a local Jewish community, they were also part of the wider local British and Christian-dominated society as well as the British Empire. The inclusion of Anglo elements may have been the result of occupying the middle space between the Protestant British society in which they were located and their identification with an increasingly international Jewish community, with the outcome being a hybrid form of services, which reflected this merging of communities. It should be noted that not all were happy about these changes to synagogue services and there were individuals who fought against these introductions. Rather than viewing these changes as a result of assimilation and acculturation, the use of these Anglo elements may instead reveal the complex identity and shifting lives of goldfield Jews. With the synagogue built, the Jewish community turned to finding a paid minister, a feat which proved to be difficult.

For a considerable number of years after the synagogue's opening ceremony, Bendigo remained without a paid minister.<sup>48</sup> Isaac Friedman, the first paid minister of the Bendigo Hebrew Congregation, did not arrive in Bendigo until 1859. Once in Bendigo as the Hebrew minister, he acted as *chazan* and *shochet*, advising the congregation on matters of worship. Isaac Friedman remained with the Bendigo Hebrew congregation until 1868,

when he removed to Melbourne with his family.<sup>49</sup> Gaps of several years between ministers was common in the more remote locations of the Australian colonies, a result of a colonial setting where religious leaders were hard to find and even harder to keep. Such gaps meant that for substantial periods, Hebrew congregations were led by their lay members who exercised a greater degree of autonomy and flexibility in their application of Jewish law.<sup>50</sup> Restricted by the vast distance from religious authorities in London and by local circumstances, Jews were at times forced to adapt religious laws to fit within their circumstances. Rather than viewing such changes as a laxity to adherence, they can be read as displaying a deep connection to Judaism which persisted despite the great obstacles and difficulties in continuing these practices.

### **Ballarat**

The formation of a Hebrew congregation in Ballarat followed a similar pattern to Bendigo. In an address in 1861, Charles Dyte dated the early beginnings of the community to 1854 and noted early meetings and gathering shad occurred in the Clarendon Hotel.<sup>51</sup> Charles Dyte had been in Ballarat since 1853, although in the very earliest years he moved between Ballarat and Melbourne to conduct business.<sup>52</sup> Charles Dyte was a seminal person in the community with his involvement in the Hebrew congregation spanning decades. Within a year, worship and gatherings moved from hotel dining rooms to a consecrated synagogue. In June 1855, the Ballarat synagogue had opened for regular worship. Located a little way from the Main Road and near the Wesleyan Chapel in Barkly Street, the weatherboard synagogue was described by a Geelong newspaper as having a 'neat' appearance, 'well fitted for the purpose for which it has been reared.'<sup>53</sup> The Rev. David Isaacs, who was for a time the minister at the congregation in Geelong, was appointed as Ballarat's first Jewish religious leader. Isaacs had first migrated to New Zealand to aid settlers in establishing strict Orthodox Jewish communities. After travelling for a time, he sailed to Australia and set up a business

in Geelong as a shoemaker.<sup>54</sup> It was not until 1855 that he moved to Ballarat as their first paid Hebrew minister. In the same year, the congregation received a *Sefer Torah*, which was donated by A. S. de Young; however, if the synagogue should close and the congregation disband, the *Sefer Torah* was to be donated to the Melbourne Hebrew Congregation.<sup>55</sup> The congregation which formed in Ballarat was clearly not expected to be permanent. In the 1850s, numerous Jewish communities and congregations had formed all over Victoria as new towns, goldfields, and settlements emerged. They were usually small and borrowed material from the larger, more well-established congregations in Melbourne. Many disbanded after a time as the Jewish population moved onwards to new goldfields or back to bigger places of settlement. As far away as Castlemaine, Talbot, and Mount Blackwood, *Sifrei Torah* were provided by the Melbourne Hebrew Congregation.<sup>56</sup> A condition of borrowing such sacred objects was that all offerings made for the call to the Torah were to be paid to the Melbourne Hebrew Congregation.<sup>57</sup> The Ballarat synagogue and the Hebrew minister also provided services and guidance to Jews who lived in surrounding areas, including Talbot, Creswick, Maryborough, Stawell, Clunes, and Ararat, displaying how ministers employed by congregations on the Central Victorian goldfields were expected to maintain a degree of mobility to ensure the religious needs of all Jews were met. Despite the recent building of the synagogue, the Ballarat Hebrew congregation was soon required to move premises.

Beginning in 1856 the Ballarat Hebrew Congregation began to receive letters from the local municipal council, which requested the synagogue grounds for a government building.<sup>58</sup> The congregational committee declined this request on the grounds that the building had already been consecrated. The use of sacred ground for a public civil building seemed not to be an issue for the council, nor the Minister of Lands who replied to a request for assistance by the Hebrew congregation with the statement that 'the public weal must prevail over any private rights'.<sup>59</sup> Probably, the dedicated

ground of a small faith community did not warrant overt concern for the council, whose members were likely to have been of a different religious faith and held no ties to the dedicated ground, nor to the local Jewish community. After repeated demands were made by the local council, the congregation consented to move. They did, however, refuse to leave until another section of land had been allocated for a synagogue, which was granted, along with land for a Hebrew school, in 1859. This new land was located only a short distance from the previous location, with the land being further down Barkly Street. Accepting these premises, the weatherboard synagogue was auctioned by Charles Dyte.<sup>60</sup> By the 1860s, the Jewish community in Ballarat had grown larger, requiring a bigger synagogue. Confident of the likelihood of an ensured congregation in Ballarat, they may have felt that it was time for the community to build a larger and more permanent synagogue. The new land which had been granted to the Hebrew congregation was at the time being occupied by others, leading to a prolonged fight over the rights for the land.

Despite the land being granted to the Hebrew congregation by the local council, the community faced some difficulty in acquiring the land. This reserve of land was Crown Lands which were at the time being occupied by the Lloyd brothers, Benjamin and Frederick, who had erected tents on the same ground. They may not have lived on this land continuously. The tents were at one stage considered to be abandoned, with notices placed for them to be removed. Compensation for the tents was discussed with one of the Lloyd brothers. The tents had been valued and monetary compensation for them had been offered by the Hebrew congregation, however, Benjamin Lloyd claimed that the value was too small and determined not to leave. Numerous court cases ensued as the Hebrew congregation and the Lloyd brothers battled for the rights of the land; the Lloyd brothers even served time in prison for trespassing on the new Hebrew reserve. The dispute over the land soon came to a head. The materials present on the Jewish reserve, which were the property of the

Lloyd brothers, were gazetted in the local paper.<sup>61</sup> If the articles were not removed, the advertisement stated, they would be sold. Charles Dyte arrived at the Jewish reserve to auction the articles and was met there by Frederick Lloyd. A fight ensued.<sup>62</sup> Frederick was charged with assault and was bound to the peace. After this incident, an agreement which included the removal of the Lloyds was arrived at by the brothers and the congregation trustees.<sup>63</sup> Shortly after this agreement, tenders were called for the construction of a brick synagogue. The tender of W. Baker was accepted with the cost, without internal fittings, estimated to be between £800 and £900.<sup>64</sup> Later reports see the number nearer to £900.<sup>65</sup> During its speedy construction, a special ceremony was held to commemorate the laying of the foundation stone.

On 26 January 1861, at eight o'clock in the morning, that ceremony was duly held at the synagogue. The trustees and the congregation committee first met at the residence of the president of the congregation, Charles Dyte, before they then proceeded to the synagogue ground. In their possession were a number of items, including corn, oil, and wine. These items represented 'the corn of nourishment, the wine of refreshment, and the oil of joy'.<sup>66</sup> After addresses by David Isaacs and Charles Dyte, a time capsule was buried. It was common for synagogue consecration ceremonies in the nineteenth century to include time capsules, in both America and Australia. American Jewish historian Shari Rabin views time capsules as working to dramatise the ceremony, as a means to 'celebrate their visibility and entrance into the local religious firmament'.<sup>67</sup> The placement of a time capsule also made a statement about the congregation's hopes for longevity in a town which was characterised by fleeting residence. Uncertain of how long their congregation would remain in Ballarat, or even the synagogue itself, the time capsule represented a hope of remembrance in place. The capsule acted as a symbolic root planted in the ground which would remain even if the congregation did not. Only a few short months later, the synagogue was completed.

By the middle of March 1861, the new Ballarat synagogue was

completed and an opening ceremony was held to mark the occasion. The opening service attracted a large crowd and included 'Jews from all parts of the world, and Christians of all denominations'.<sup>68</sup> The seating, as per Jewish custom, was separated by gender with women seated in the gallery above while men occupied the ground floor, which the local newspaper reported as being 'strikingly novel', as was the practice of men keeping their hats on.<sup>69</sup> Starting later than they intended, the special opening ceremony was followed by an afternoon service. Hermann Deutsch was even part of the choir organised for the service.<sup>70</sup> Deutsch became a seminal member of the Ballarat Hebrew Congregation, and on several occasions acted as auditor and printer for the synagogue committee.<sup>71</sup> The ceremony and following service held many of the traditional elements of Judaic worship with heads covered, men in prayer shawls (*tallisim*), and prayers for the royal family; however, it also contained Anglo elements. A choir was organised to sing, the minister Rev. David Isaacs wore black robes, and a sermon was provided in English.<sup>72</sup> Such additions may simply have been added for the benefit of Christian observers but more likely hints at the deeper changes which were occurring in the Victorian Jewish community, indeed in much of the Anglo-Jewish world, where Christian elements were incorporated into the religious services and practice of Jews, as discussed previously. David Isaacs's sermon preached at the opening service highlighted and hinted at this change also. In his sermon he appealed to the congregation to be 'zealous and faithful in the observance of their religious duties and the maintenance of loyalty to their race and faith'.<sup>73</sup> Included also were some answers to objections 'said to be urged by the lukewarm members of the fraternity'.<sup>74</sup> Isaacs characterised such objections as arising in an effort for such members to 'shield themselves from the reproaches of their conscience for neglect of duty'.<sup>75</sup> He certainly must have felt that the religious observance of some members was slipping to answer such appeals so directly, disclosing the religious adherence of the congregation who did not strictly practice Jewish law. While the



ideas of religious leaders could reflect change in the community, it may not have necessarily expressed the views held by congregants. The neglect of traditional practices did not always emerge out of lukewarm members, but to the inability to observe such laws in a distant society which lacked the needed institutions, religious items, and knowledgeable Jews to perform certain rituals.<sup>76</sup> The members themselves may not have felt that they were being lukewarm, but rather pragmatic and flexible, adapting to an environment and a society which was increasingly being defined by its mobility, and its distant place within the Anglophone world and empire.

### **Conclusion**

The Victorian gold rushes turned the 1850s into a turbulent decade for the colony, but without this rush the Jewish community of Victoria would have not developed so rapidly, nor were Hebrew congregations likely to have formed in Bendigo and Ballarat. The Hebrew congregations and communities which were established became significant places of Jewish settlement in the Victorian colony. The Jews who made the long trek to these goldfields to mine, set up businesses, or to work old trades quickly came together to form a small and yet important part of the developing society. These Jewish communities became significant contributors to local charitable societies and institutions, while they simultaneously maintained ties to an international Jewish network which stretched as far as Jerusalem and Britain. Jewish migrants on the Central Victorian goldfields were mobile and many tended to journey to other places after a period of residence in Bendigo or Ballarat, either moving onwards after a span of a few years or even a few decades. While the Jewish population was mobile, the speedy construction of synagogues and Jewish institutions enabled a long-lasting place in the wider Gentile community to be created. The Jewish communities of Ballarat and Bendigo actively worked to establish the basic institutions and places needed to maintain a Jewish religious life, spaces which both Jews



and Gentiles interacted with and moved through. The Jewish congregations and communities which formed in Bendigo and Ballarat would endure longer than any other goldfield Hebrew congregation that formed in the 1850s but they were not communities without difficulties. The greatest complication would be in maintaining traditional Judaic observations and tenets in these remote settlements which held few of the religious items, knowledgeable persons, and institutions needed to lead a traditional Jewish life. Despite such difficulties, these congregations and communities would endure for decades to come.

### Author's note

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### Endnotes

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- 24 PROV, VPRS 947, Unassisted Inward Overseas Passenger Lists (British Ports, Foreign and New Zealand, Fiche: 60, 3; PROV, VPRS 947, Unassisted Inward Overseas Passenger Lists (British Ports, Foreign and New Zealand, Fiche: 60, 3. Caroline Chisholm was a well-known nineteenth century social reformer. In 1854 she aided 19 Jewish women to emigrate to Victoria, travelling with them on board the ship *Ballarat*. On board the vessel was also a Jewish minister and his wife. The sister appear on the unassisted passenger list as they were helped privately by the Jewish Ladies' Visiting and Benevolent Society, Jewish Emigration Society', *Jewish Chronicle*, 26 February

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