

MICHAEL CASHMORE: A THUMBNAIL SKETCH OF A PASSENGER ON THE *CLONMEL*

David Cohen

'*Clonmel*', wrote Peter Harvey, 'was no common steamer but the pride of the fledgling colony. It was a luxury ship with the latest technology from England, enabling it to connect Sydney and Melbourne in just 24 hours. It was carrying a number of influential society people from Sydney and valuable cargo on only its second run on the all-important east coast route.'

Just as the history of the pioneering steamship *Clonmel* and its wreckage in 1841 were most significant events in the early history of Victoria, so too did at least one of the passengers on that ill-fated voyage leave a lasting impact on Australian history. That passenger — my great-great-grandfather Michael Cashmore — was born in Cutler Street, Houndsditch, on 7 March 1815, the eldest of six children of Joseph and Alice (née Nathan) Cashmore. Joseph, a goldsmith by trade, died in London when Michael was aged only nine and Alice was left to raise Michael, his brother David and sisters Leah, Sarah, Rebecca and Esther. Little appears known of his childhood and growing years.

About 1836, at the age of 21, Michael emigrated from England to Sydney, Australia. Like the origin of the surname 'Cashmore', the reason why he travelled to Australia can only be a matter for conjecture. It was the time of the great Irish famine, and of poverty in England, so perhaps Michael, as the oldest son of his widowed mother, was sent out to explore the greener pastures of the new colony. When he first arrived in Sydney, he set up shop in George Street as a draper. About two years later, Michael travelled to Port Phillip, departing on the *Bright Planet* on 18 June 1840 with four trunks and 22 cases of wares. On 29 August 1840, he signed a lease for 'Allotment 1' at Number 1 Collins Street, block 12 (Trevor Cohen, 1967). Meanwhile, Betsy Solomon emigrated to Sydney from London with her father Samuel Moss Solomon (inventor of lead pencils), mother Esther and brother Isaac. They arrived in Sydney on the 400-ton *Enchantress* on 24 April 1833, when Betsy was only eleven years old. In Sydney, Michael Cashmore met Betsy Solomon and they were married there in December 1840.

It was probably a serendipitous opportunity for the romantic young honeymooners that the 600-ton *Clonmel* was due to leave Sydney on her second voyage to Port Phillip on 30 December 1840. Not only were the newlyweds set to have what, 160 years ago, was no doubt potentially a luxury cruise for their honeymoon, but they were also set to establish a marvellous pioneering enterprise, a drapery store at 'Number One, Melbourne' the highly visible property then known as '1 Collins Street', on the corner of Collins and Elizabeth Streets.¹ The *Clonmel* was loaded with goods destined to provide the stock necessary for the soon-to-be-opened Cashmore store.

The honeymoon of Betsy and Michael became much more adventurous than they had bargained for, with the grounding of the *Clonmel* on a sandbank at 3 a.m. on 2 January 1841. I can only imagine how they must have felt as they anxiously awaited rescue and transfer via whaleboat to the safety of Port Albert, and then patiently hoped for a rescuer to take them to Port Phillip. Fortunately they were saved after several days by the vessel *Sisters* which transported them to their original honeymoon destination. The total loss of their household goods and personal belongings, as well as the cargo for Michael's drapery store — clothing items, buttons — might have spelled doom for most people. But apparently not for the courageous and entrepreneurial young Cashmores.

Their arrival in Melbourne — and eventual joining of them by many members of their large extended family (estimated as exceeding 500 people) — has been of great historical significance to Australia. Michael himself was a noteworthy pioneer in the early life of Melbourne. Not only was he one of the earliest and most visible merchants in Melbourne's city area, but also he became an influential leader in a variety of other activities. He was politically active, representing Latrobe ward of the Melbourne Town Council from 1846 to 1848 and exerting strong pressures upon the state legislature. For example, during the struggle in 1850 for separation of Victoria from New South Wales, he was responsible for having a meeting deferred to avoid a clash with *Rosh Hashanah*. He was a Justice of the Peace who sat regularly on the Bench (the first member of the Jewish community appointed as a JP), a director of the Melbourne Gas Company and a promoter of the National Bank of Australasia.

Little seems known of the personal lives of Michael and Betsy Cashmore. Michael does figure in a minor way in Melbourne's theatrical history. He joined in Melbourne's first theatrical production in 1842 and was said to have considered himself 'equal to anything from Hamlet or Shylock down to executing a hornpipe' (T. Cohen). He was also active in the field of Freemasonry. Soon after the active establishment of Freemasonry in the Port Phillip district (now Victoria), it was recorded on 4 December 1842 that Michael Cashmore was Master of the Prince of Wales Masonic Lodge 434 (of Irish Constitution and later Victorian Constitution). The Lodge met at the court house in Smythesdale. He was also an officer in the Australia Felix Lodge. When in 1857 Michael moved for a time to Ballarat and Brown's Diggings (near Daylesford), he continued his active interest in public affairs. Returning to Melbourne, he was appointed Melbourne City Council Inspector of Meat Markets and held this post from 1869 until 1886.

Michael Cashmore was one of the small group who pioneered the establishment of today's thriving but small Australian Jewish community (now about 100,000 or slightly more than 0.5 per cent of the total population). Jewish settlement began in 1839 when the ship *Hope* arrived from England and, by March 1841, the Jewish population had risen to 57, or slightly more than 0.5 per cent of Port Phillip's total population of 11,738 which climbed steeply to 20,416 by the end of 1841.

In the early days of settlement, there were major difficulties in promoting observance of orthodox Jewish traditions. Together with several other early

did 'not wish to sever from the faith of their fathers'. While MHC President in 1850, Cashmore instructed the minister, Reverend Rintel, to perform the ritual circumcision (*b'ris*) of the new-born child of such a couple. (He was subsequently censured by the Chief Rabbi). On the other hand, he also sought to prevent violation of Jewish traditions. While President of MHC in 1850, he was disturbed to discover that an honour paid to a person attending a synagogue service (a call to witness the reading from the *Torah* scroll) had resulted from 'a misrepresentation of your own to me in your application this week', and he wrote a letter of rebuke to the person involved in case the misdemeanour might be construed as a precedent. While not strictly observant in every sense, Cashmore was concerned to preserve *Shabbat* and the holydays according to traditional practice. In 1845, 25 of Melbourne's drapery and clothing stores were owned by Jews. Despite the highly competitive market, he took the initiative for early closing and he was a signatory agreeing to close his business at 8 p.m. In response to an article in the *Times* regarding distress in Jerusalem, Cashmore convened a public meeting to raise funds; over £2000 was sent for assistance to Moses Montefiore.

On arrival in Sydney in 1836, Cashmore set up shop as a draper in George Street. Despite the disastrous loss of his stock and, no doubt, quite a large sum of money in the *Clonmel*, we now know that his retail and wholesale business (the 'London & Manchester Warehouses') opened at the north-eastern corner of Collins and Elizabeth Streets within months of his arrival in Melbourne, and remained there until 1855. The rented double-storey house and store (erected in 1839) became known as 'Cashmore's Corner'. It was Melbourne's first brick building and, for a while, the tallest building in Port Phillip. Outside was 'Lake Cashmore', a water-hole about a metre in depth.

With nearly 50 drapery stores in Melbourne in the mid-1840s, there was intense competition and, in order to eke out an existence, shopkeepers were forced to work long hours, extend their range of goods and advertise extensively in the local newspapers. Cashmore advertised hosiery, drapery, ready-made clothes and other wares. His advertisement was in the form of a writ 'signed by Henry Makewell, Charles Wearwell and George Vercycheap'. The difficulty of earning a decent living in an era of economic depression in Melbourne before 1844 forced the breakdown of the early closing agreement, but Cashmore managed to retain his solvency and integrity, as was written: 'It is said that Cashmore, No. 1 Collins Street East, is the only man in town who can give you the full change of a five pound note.'

In May 1842, Michael and Betsy became parents of Alice, the first Jewish girl born in Port Phillip. Cashmore's sister Esther, following her marriage in London in 1835 to his (Cashmore's) lifelong friend Isaac Crawcour, emigrated with Isaac to Melbourne, settling in Geelong and raising ten Crawcour children (another died as an infant). At the same time, brother David Cashmore emigrated to Melbourne and set up a drapery store in Geelong. Sister Rebecca may have come at the same time, as she married Alfred Abraham at Michael's home in 1853 and mothered four surviving children. In 1853, Cashmore's mother Alice (then about 57 years old) also arrived in Melbourne — perhaps to attend Rebecca's wedding. Such immigration to the Port Phillip district was an early

example of Jewish chain migration to Australia, a phenomenon which was to grow markedly over the next 160 years. Other Crawcour family members from London later also settled in Ballarat and they also became prominent leaders of the Geelong Jewish community. Cashmore's mother Alice lived until 1873, dying at the age of 77; she was buried in the East Geelong Cemetery in a now-dilapidated grave. Just 13 years later, Michael himself died at home, St Vincent's Place, Albert Park, on 17 October 1886, leaving his widow Betsy and eight adult children. The Reverend Dr Abrahams officiated at his funeral in the Melbourne General Cemetery. Betsy lived until 1898.

REFERENCES AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Note: each of the above authors drew heavily upon extensive research by Trevor S. Cohen for information about Vaiben and Emanuel Solomon and Michael Cashmore, first published by Trevor S. Cohen, 'Michael Cashmore: a Melbourne pioneer', in *Australian Jewish Historical Society Journal*, Vol 6, Part 3, March 1967.

Robert Bell, Masonic Lodge Data Base on Ballarat & District Freemasonry, referring to the Central Highlands of Victoria records of Freemasons Lodges.

NOTE

- 1 This property was purchased in 1998 by my first cousin Trevor Cohen and re-developed as strata units named 'Cashmore on Collins'.

