

## EXODUS AND PANIC? MELBOURNE'S REACTION TO THE BATHURST GOLD DISCOVERIES OF MAY 1851

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### **Abstract**

*News of gold discoveries at Bathurst, New South Wales, in May 1851 aroused great excitement across Australia and the world. In Melbourne, the reaction ranged from calm optimism to concerned alarm. But subsequent writers were inclined towards the alarmist view. Even the most objective of historians, when faced with the need to write abbreviated accounts of what happened, have used words such as 'exodus' or 'panic' to sum up Melbourne's reaction. However, a careful reading of contemporary correspondence and press reports suggests this was not the way that most saw it at the time.*

**W**HEN NEWS OF POTENTIALLY RICH GOLDFIELDS near Bathurst, west of Sydney, reached Melbourne late in May 1851, there was a 'migration of the population to New South Wales and ... panic [was] created throughout the whole Colony'. At least, that is what a Victorian Legislative Council Select Committee reported in March 1854.<sup>1</sup> By contrast, in October 1851, just four months after the Bathurst news, Victoria's Lieutenant-Governor, Charles La Trobe believed that, although the discoveries at Bathurst had 'unsettled the public mind of the labouring classes ... few comparatively of the labouring classes' actually left Melbourne for Bathurst.<sup>2</sup> La Trobe's description of comparatively few leaving Melbourne does not match the panic and exodus of the Committee's

report—yet historians have repeated the report’s sentiments and ignored La Trobe’s ever since. This paper investigates the initial response of Melbourne, between late May and mid-July 1851, to the news of the Bathurst gold discovery.

### **Initial Responses in Sydney and Melbourne**

News between Sydney and Melbourne was usually sent by the overland mail or on the regular steamer *Shamrock*. The time taken for despatches to arrive varied considerably, depending upon whether the mail was about to leave and unforeseen delays along the way. An example of this uncertainty followed the publication of a vague report of gold near Molong in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 29 March 1851.<sup>3</sup> Apart from this unconfirmed gold news, the Sydney correspondent for the *Argus* had several other reports to send back to Melbourne, the most important concerning a debate in the Legislative Council about the imminent creation of the colony of Victoria. The correspondent had the choice of sending the urgent report either by the overland mail, or by the steamer *Shamrock*, both of which were due to leave Sydney on 1 April. He decided: ‘The overland mail and the mail by the *Shamrock*, close about the same hour to-day, and as it is uncertain which will reach Melbourne first, I think it necessary to send you duplicate communications’. The overland mail reached Melbourne in time for the Legislative Council report to be published on Tuesday 8 April.<sup>4</sup> The gold report, which he considered of lesser importance, was sent by the *Shamrock*, which arrived on Wednesday 9 April and was published on 11 April.<sup>5</sup> The correspondent dismissed the Molong gold as simply ‘another gold mine’ and wondered why ‘nothing seems to come of these wonderful discoveries’.<sup>6</sup> The gold report appears to have created no discernible reaction in Melbourne; the report of impending separation from New South Wales was of much greater interest.

Throughout April, there were a number of vague and unconfirmed reports of gold near Bathurst published in the Sydney press.<sup>7</sup> Apart from the *Geelong Advertiser* dismissing them as ‘apocryphal’, the reports generated little reaction in Melbourne.<sup>8</sup> By mid-April, the Sydney press was becoming more excited about the reports from Bathurst, but most were still sceptical, and it was not until 29 April that the *Sydney Morning Herald* decided: ‘Recent intelligence would lead to the inference that there is *something* in the recent alleged discovery of gold in the western districts.’<sup>9</sup> By 6 May, the *Argus* still thought the news from April was ‘not altogether credited’.<sup>10</sup>

It was only after the government surveyor, Samuel Stutchbury, was sent to Bathurst to confirm the reports that excitement really began to grow in Sydney.<sup>11</sup> Again, the Melbourne and Geelong press copied the reports of Stutchbury's mission a week later without additional comment.<sup>12</sup> The Melbourne press was more interested in news that Doctor George Bruhn, a German mineralogist who had been undertaking a locally sponsored survey in the Macedon and Pyrenees Ranges closer to Melbourne since February, had 'been fortunate enough to discover the existence of gold'. Bruhn was expected to return to Melbourne in about eight weeks.<sup>13</sup>

Even after a more positive report appeared in the Sydney *Empire* on 7 May, it aroused no comment when published on page four of the *Argus* on 17 May. But then, as the Sydney *Empire* said, 'It would be premature to speculate.'<sup>14</sup> More reports appeared in the Sydney press in mid-May, including news that over 200 had left Sydney for Bathurst.<sup>15</sup> These reports eventually reached Melbourne, but still aroused no comment.<sup>16</sup> By Friday 23 May, the *Argus* had still only received Sydney news to 13 May, but reported that surveyor Stutchbury had sent 30 ounces to the government, which was yet to decide on its reaction.<sup>17</sup> The *Argus* now thought the discovery was probably authentic, and the *Melbourne Morning Herald* carried a similarly positive report dated 16 May, but both missed the news that the Executive Council had met in Sydney on that day and ordered extra police to the site.<sup>18</sup> The Council met again on 22 May after receiving Stutchbury's long-awaited report confirming the value of the goldfields.<sup>19</sup> By Saturday 24 May, the Sydney press was publishing details of the new gold licenses, but the news being published in Melbourne was still eight-days-old.<sup>20</sup> The first overland mail for the week had arrived on Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup>, but was 'saturated with wet' and the 'newspapers damaged by friction'.<sup>21</sup> The second overland mail from Sydney arrived in Melbourne over the weekend, although the *Geelong Advertiser* of 27 May complained that it had not arrived as expected and presumed it had been detained by floods in the upper Murray—'This is a disappointment, as we expected three days later news from the diggings. It is not likely that we shall have any intelligence till Thursday next.'<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, on Monday 26 May, both the *Argus* and the *Melbourne Morning Herald* carried positive news of the existence of gold, but even then the leading article in the *Argus* was about the impending Victorian elections.<sup>23</sup> The *Herald* gave the gold more prominence and printed extracts from private letters received by the overland mail, with one correspondent asking Victorians, 'What do you

say to Separation now?’ The implication was partly that after separation the southern colony would gain no benefit from any revenue that might come from the gold discovery, but, more directly, it was a barbed response to longstanding complaints that the Middle District had misappropriated revenue that rightfully belonged to the Port Phillip District. The *Herald* cautioned Melburnians to ‘ponder well the difficulties and dangers that await them’ should they decide to head for Bathurst.<sup>24</sup>

### **‘Exodus’ and ‘Panic’ or Optimism in Melbourne?**

By such means, news of the Bathurst gold discoveries reached Melbourne. Contemporary observers of the rapidly unfolding events reacted in ways that ranged from alarm to optimism, and subsequent writers tended to show a preference for one over the other—usually the alarmist view. In stories, alarm, rather than calm, captures the imagination. But even the most objective of historians faces constraints that call for abbreviated accounts of what happened and must decide what to include, what to exclude, and how to summarise a year of detailed events into a chapter or paragraph. A month of events that are described in a chapter by one historian may be abbreviated to a page by another; to a paragraph; a sentence; and finally to a single word. Indeed, Graeme Davison believes that, ‘The secret of Melbourne’s rapid rise can be told in a single word—gold.’<sup>25</sup> Likewise, the single words ‘exodus’ or ‘panic’ have often been used, without accompanying justification, to sum up Melbourne’s reaction to the opening of goldfields near Bathurst.<sup>26</sup> However, a careful reading of contemporary correspondence and press reports suggests this was not the way many, if not the majority, saw it at the time.

It can be argued that the reaction throughout the Port Phillip District was predominantly one of excitement and optimism. Excitement, because that is what gold causes, and, as David Goodman has observed, there was debate in both Victoria and California about ‘the levels of excitement that were desirable in society.’<sup>27</sup> Charles La Trobe, for one, preferred calm and steady progress, rather than excited and rapid change.<sup>28</sup> But gold also caused optimism, because those in Port Phillip who had been calling for the development of known goldfields for the previous two years, now saw a precedent that would hasten the process and provide lasting benefits for industry, the economy and immigration. As the *Geelong Advertiser* observed on 31 May 1851, ‘the magic name of gold is sufficiently exciting

without any other element to feed it, and we cannot contemplate enterprise employed in its attainment, otherwise but legitimate direction of labour'.<sup>29</sup>

After a decade of bitter antagonism between the Middle District of New South Wales centred on Sydney, and the Port Phillip District centred on Melbourne, the Port Phillip District was to be granted separation from New South Wales on 1 July 1851. The causes of the antagonism can be found in the remoteness and apparent indifference of the New South Wales government based in Sydney—a constant frustration for the residents of Port Phillip, and for their Superintendent, Charles La Trobe; the ongoing 'misappropriation' of Port Phillip revenue to cover costs associated with the Middle District—frequently referred to as blatant theft; and more recently, bitter differences of opinion that had emerged over the diversion of convict ships from Port Phillip to Sydney in 1849.<sup>30</sup> From a purely financial point of view, the victor in the contest was clearly Melbourne, as the Middle District relied heavily upon income generated by Port Phillip, and Sydney would soon be in serious financial difficulties.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, as Governor George Gipps observed a few years earlier, 'the appropriation of Port Phillip money to Port Phillip purposes alone would leave the citizens of Sydney under a total inability to pay their bounties'.<sup>32</sup>

Fortuitously for the Middle District, a solution came only two months before the separation of Port Phillip when extensive gold deposits were confirmed near Bathurst.<sup>33</sup> A Melbourne correspondent thought: 'The revenue of almost bankrupt Sydney, will be no doubt invigorated by the discovery of the gold ... the annual plunder of Victoria having ceased ... [it became] ... imperatively necessary that, some other source, whence the Treasury might be replenished, should be discovered.'<sup>34</sup> The *Sydney Morning Herald* denied there was a crisis, and claimed that jealousy and a spiteful sense of superiority led to such statements from Victoria.<sup>35</sup> Even so, *Bell's Life in Sydney* sneered, 'Poor divorced Victoria! Don't you wish you could get it!'<sup>36</sup>

But Melbourne was not too concerned about 'wishing they could get it', because many knew that Port Phillip already had it. Indeed, in February 1849, long before Edward Hargraves thought of looking for gold near Bathurst, a Frenchman, Alexandre Duchene, gave Charles La Trobe detailed directions for locating gold discovered by a shepherd in the Pyrenees Ranges. When *Bell's Life* heard of the Pyrenees discovery, it assumed the gold would 'not be procured in any large quantities, until the "Act of Separation" be passed'.<sup>37</sup> This was logical given the extent to which Sydney

had been appropriating Port Phillip's revenue, and perhaps La Trobe thought the same when he sent police to disperse the Pyrenees gold seekers.<sup>38</sup> After receiving a cool response from La Trobe and Governor Charles FitzRoy, Duchene went to California a few months before Hargraves, where he told stories about finding gold 'west of Sydney', and how he had unsuccessfully sought a reward and government appointment. Duchene died in the 1850 San Francisco cholera epidemic, but Hargraves returned to Australia determined not only to find the gold west of Sydney, but to successfully claim both the reward and the government appointment.<sup>39</sup> Unknown to Hargraves, in March 1849, Duchene's meeting with La Trobe, together with reports of minerals in the Middle District, prompted FitzRoy to request an official minerals survey. Samuel Stutchbury, the surveyor, began his work in January 1851. It is likely that gold would soon have been confirmed even without Hargraves's efforts.

Searching for gold in the Pyrenees was officially discouraged in 1849, but unofficially the area was regularly explored and exploited, and there were ongoing calls for the development of Port Phillip's mineral deposits. Now, in May 1851, with news that the Bathurst goldfields were to be opened, and diggers licensed to dig, many in Port Phillip could see no good reason for local goldfields to continue to be off limits. This would be good news for most, but as with any event likely to trigger rapid and dramatic social change, there were pessimists and doomsayers—those whom the *Argus* called 'chattering alarmists' and 'prophets of evil', and those who suffered from what the *Geelong Advertiser* labelled 'aurophobia'.<sup>40</sup>

Responding to the pessimists, the *Argus* thought, 'One would fancy from the tone adopted, that some serious calamity had befallen us, instead of a very valuable addition having been made to our list of productions. ... we have no reason to despair.'<sup>41</sup> Indeed, the *Argus* pointed out: 'The eagerness with which men naturally run after that attractive metal cannot but, at first, produce such changes as will amount in a great degree to a sort of social disorganization; and considerable inconvenience, and some loss will accrue before the counterbalancing advantages will be fully developed.' Beyond that, 'the amount of injury is apt to be very much overrated' and such reports were 'all nonsense'.<sup>42</sup> The *Geelong Advertiser* had similar views: 'A temporary derangement of the usual current of industry will be experienced, but the results will not be unfavourable to social progress.'<sup>43</sup> And a few days later: 'A prospective good must be purchased at a present sacrifice.'<sup>44</sup> Then again: 'What is true need not be feared. ... The fact of

the existence of gold in profusion will not be got rid of by side winds and woful [*sic*] anticipations, and why should it be feared?'<sup>45</sup> But, despite the reassurance, there were still a few who threw up their arms in panic—and, 'Nothing,' observed the *Argus*, 'is so contagious as panic.'<sup>46</sup>

At the beginning of June 1851, the *Melbourne Times* acknowledged that the Bathurst news had 'created a sensation' in Melbourne and that 'fears of the ultimate result were entertained' by some.<sup>47</sup> The lawless example and greed-driven rushes of California were fresh in the minds of all, but the *Geelong Advertiser* dismissed negative comparisons with California and pointed to the benefits.<sup>48</sup> The *Times* also concluded: 'there is no cause to fear a panic in Melbourne from mining mania'; some shepherds, shearers and building labourers might leave, 'but beyond this, we cannot see any bad effects likely to arise; on the contrary there will ultimately be a reaction and our colony will be more prosperous than ever'.<sup>49</sup> Indeed, a few days earlier, the *Times* had noted that at the Pyrenees 'there are parties now driving a lucrative trade by bringing ... [gold] ... to Melbourne'.<sup>50</sup>

Among the alarmists were writers at the *Melbourne Morning Herald*, who, on 7 June, wrote that 'the gold field migration [from Port Phillip] continues both by land and sea', but supported this with reference only to 'half a dozen fresh expeditions' preparing to travel overland.<sup>51</sup> In fact, by 7 June, very few had left by sea and the numbers going overland were uncertain. Three days earlier, a correspondent from Geelong reported that anticipation was not of an exodus, but of an eventual massive increase in immigration.<sup>52</sup> The *Herald* claimed 'several desertions of apprentices' had taken place; others had 'sold off all the goods and chattels' they owned; and 'passages were thickly taken in the many vessels now laid on for Sydney'.<sup>53</sup> How many had actually done these things was not specified, and the *Argus* responded with a denunciation of those who were 'disseminating the most extravagant reports'.<sup>54</sup> Not only were there extravagant reports about Melbourne's reaction, but about the discovery itself, and, when the *Maitland Mercury* saw the Melbourne papers, it thought the 'letters that had reached Melbourne evidently gave the most highly coloured rumours'.<sup>55</sup>

Nevertheless, while extravagant reports tend to capture the imagination and remain in popular memory, they can also serve the interests of those later wishing to claim credit for stopping the imagined panic. In 1895, Louis Michel claimed people 'were leaving for Sydney by every possible means'—but then, he also wanted to claim maximum credit for stopping the supposed exodus by discovering local gold.<sup>56</sup> William Campbell also

claimed there was a ‘migration of the population’ and ‘panic created throughout the whole colony’—but as we shall see, he too had personal reasons for claiming to be the saviour of the colony.<sup>57</sup> Others simply went with the story that sounded most impressive: Edwin Booth—‘no sacrifice was too great to make in order to get to the diggings’; William Hall—‘our labourers left us by ship-loads’; and Robert Martin—‘alarm was felt throughout the settlement lest the flocks would perish for want of shepherds, while agriculture would be entirely abandoned’.<sup>58</sup> Thomas McCombie wrote in 1861 that there was a ‘great crisis’ when ‘labour flowed’ to New South Wales—reflecting his own alarmist views of a decade earlier.<sup>59</sup> Even the *Argus*, which maintained a relatively calm approach through mid-1851, had had a change of editor and a lapse of memory by 1882, when it claimed the colony had been ‘paralysed in its industrial pursuits by a commenced exodus of the working population’.<sup>60</sup> These vivid secondary accounts were a distorted version of the commentary that appeared in the contemporary press of mid-1851.

Later writers repeated such accounts. Geoffrey Blainey said that Louis Michel ‘had been so perturbed by the exodus of customers and cronies ... that he decided only gold would lure them back’.<sup>61</sup> Ronald Younger thought: ‘*Melbourne* was not prepared to allow the great *exodus* to go unchallenged. Activity was all but paralysed as more and more people left.’<sup>62</sup> Serle sums up the period between the Bathurst news in late May and the confirmation of Victorian goldfields in mid-July in just over one page and refers the reader to Louis Cranfield for ‘an authoritative account’ of the beginnings of the 1851 Victorian gold discoveries.<sup>63</sup> Wrongly citing 26 April 1851 as the day news arrived, Cranfield said that ‘within a week every ship for Sydney had been booked out, warehouses became deserted and in short the District of Port Phillip was in similar straits to that of New South Wales after gold had been discovered in California’. Cranfield went on to use phrases such as ‘mass exodus’ and ‘panic migration’, but, like the ‘chattering alarmists’ of 1851, such terms misrepresent what happened and reflect only the most extreme reaction.<sup>64</sup> Cranfield, like Blainey, gave much credence to Louis Michel’s 1895 account, and his claim that small ‘lime craft which usually traded to the Port Phillip Heads’ were ‘pressed into service’.<sup>65</sup> However, there appears to be no evidence for this.<sup>66</sup>

The problem with accounts written over a century after the event is not so much that later historians were influenced by biased reports in the contemporary press, but that they seem to have relied largely upon



colourful secondary accounts, written some time after the event, rather than confirming that terms such as 'exodus' and 'panic' actually reflected the feeling of mid-1851.

### Contemporary Press Accounts

Of course, the contemporary press was also frequently biased in its reporting. In January 1848, Charles La Trobe gave his opinion of the Melbourne press.<sup>67</sup> The *Melbourne Argus*, he considered, was read mainly by 'the Presbyterians and Orange parties'. La Trobe's personal opinion was that the 'violent and disgraceful party spirit' that had arisen in Melbourne, though not started by the editor of the *Argus*, had 'nevertheless mainly been kept alive by his publications'. The *Argus*, he said, 'violently deprecates the introduction of prison labour in any form'. Of the main Port Phillip newspapers—the *Daily News*, edited by George Boursiquot; the *Melbourne Morning Herald*, edited by William Kerr; and the *Port Phillip Gazette*, edited by Thomas McCombie—it was James Harrison's *Geelong Advertiser* that La Trobe believed held the most balanced views. La Trobe's opinion of the press did not change, and when he wrote to his friend John Murray about recent gold yields in Victoria in 1852, he said, 'Our colonial newspapers have such a bad character—that ten to one their statements will be doubted, & perhaps with justice.'<sup>68</sup> Edmund Finn, better known as Garryowen, was chief writer for the *Melbourne Morning Herald*, and later regarded the 'outspoken and uncompromising' *Argus* as the 'mouthpiece of public opinion'.<sup>69</sup> As for the *Herald*, he regarded it as being 'hand-in-glove' with the Melbourne Club, which saw the paper as being its 'semi official organ'.<sup>70</sup> It would, however, be too much of a generalisation to suggest that the *Argus* represented the view of the workers, while the *Herald* represented that of the employers.

For all its failings, the colonial press of Melbourne and elsewhere, provides an invaluable source, not only of historical information, but, importantly, a feeling for the essence of life in those times. Just as judging the importance of historical events depends on the viewpoint of the observer, deciding whether a newspaper displays bias also depends on one's own point of view. Nevertheless, by comparing narrative and opinions from rival newspapers, as well as those less closely connected with Melbourne—the press of Van Diemen's Land, South Australia, New Zealand, and even England—and combining these accounts with those written by private residents, contemporary visitors, and the accounts in

official correspondence, it is possible to build a reasonably objective view of the events of 1851.

### Passengers and Overlanders

Although some previous historians, such as Serle, seem to have made an attempt to estimate the actual numbers of passengers travelling from Melbourne to Sydney in mid-1851, digital technology has made the interrogation of passenger lists, whether in newspaper reports or in official archives, easier. Within a week of news arriving on 24 May 1851, only three ships had left Melbourne for Sydney and another three had started advertising passages—but they were not booked out. During 1851, the route was regularly served by five or six ships each month, as well as schooners that made single trips with a few passengers. Between February and May 1851, an average of about 125 passengers per month went to Sydney.<sup>71</sup> The regular steamer, *Shamrock*, sailed at eight o'clock on 24 May.<sup>72</sup> It carried 58 passengers—only eight more than in April, and ten more than February. But with seven fewer than March, it was not booked to capacity, despite the *Cornwall Chronicle* inflating the number with 'upward of ninety steerage passengers'.<sup>73</sup> When the *Shamrock* left Melbourne again on 25 June, it carried only 31 passengers; and, in July, the number dropped to 26.<sup>74</sup> The declining number on the *Shamrock* in June was caused after the Sydney owners raised fares to cover increased seamen's wages, and several other ships offering lower fares were diverted from their usual routes.<sup>75</sup> In mid-July, the *Shamrock's* fare rise was reversed.<sup>76</sup>

The *Argus* of 26 May reported 30 to 40 people had 'secured passages' for Sydney, implying they were off to the 'diggings'.<sup>77</sup> The only ship advertising for Sydney, apart from the *Shamrock*, was the brig *Emma Prescott*.<sup>78</sup> Having cleared out from Melbourne on 23 May with no passengers at all, it sailed on 25 May, the day after the Bathurst news, with nine passengers and 400 bags of sugar. With 13 passengers fewer than it brought to Melbourne, like the *Shamrock*, it was hardly filled to capacity.<sup>79</sup>

The *Hirondelle* started advertising on 27 May, intending to depart on the thirty-first. It left on 3 June with 16 passengers and 800 bags of flour. A regular on the route, the *Hirondelle* returned to Melbourne a few weeks later with 11 passengers. Between February and August 1851, the *Hirondelle* carried 59 passengers to Sydney, and 73 to Melbourne.<sup>80</sup> Not only was the ship not filled to capacity, but any 'exodus' on the *Hirondelle* was more than cancelled by those coming to Melbourne.



*'Diggers on the road to a rush', John Skinner Prout (artist), J. Godfrey (engraver), reproduced from Australia (Edwin Carton Booth, London: Virtue & Co., 1874-1876?).*

*'RHSV Collection –BK006-0004'*

The schooner *White Squall* arrived from Launceston on 6 May with two passengers, and was offered for sale as suitable for the Port Phillip coastal trade.<sup>81</sup> By Friday 30 May, 'Queen's wharf was completely blocked up with bags of flour' to be shipped by the *White Squall*.<sup>82</sup> The new owners were taking advantage of inflated flour prices in Sydney, where people were urged to 'speculate in flour' as 'a safe and sure investment'.<sup>83</sup> Due to sail on 31 May, it departed on 5 June with 957 bags of flour and 22 passengers.<sup>84</sup>

The new schooner *Don Juan*, intending to sail from Sydney to Hobart on 6 May, was diverted 'to take a valuable cargo to Victoria'. The agents added: 'Should inducement offer, the *Don Juan* will be continued as a regular packet to Melbourne.'<sup>85</sup> The 'valuable cargo' was 100 tons of coal, which was needed more than gold was in Melbourne, and which was being imported from Newcastle at highly inflated prices.<sup>86</sup> Indeed, after the Pyrenees gold discovery in 1849, Charles La Trobe observed that he would have preferred 'the discovery of a good vein of coal'.<sup>87</sup> Due to return to Sydney, from 29 May, the *Don Juan* advertised 'An Eligible Opportunity

for Proceeding to the Gold Diggings'. A week later, there were still 12 berths vacant and the Master had to remind intending passengers to pay their outstanding fares. He sailed on 8 June with 45 passengers, 750 bags of flour and a cargo of tea.<sup>88</sup> Upon reaching Sydney, the *Don Juan* was to return to Melbourne 'full or not full', but was instead diverted to Adelaide and offered for sale.<sup>89</sup>

On 11 June, a correspondent in Sydney observed that 'an unusual number of vessels are laid on at Melbourne for Sydney, and passengers invited to the "gold field" ... You must warn them against this delusion'.<sup>90</sup> The only ship to mention the 'gold field' was the *Don Juan*.

On 4 June, the *Courier* claimed 'thousands are preparing to leave for the new "diggings"', but a letter from Port Phillip received in Sydney on 13 June stated, 'I do not think that 100 persons have yet left Melbourne by sea, although great numbers have started overland'.<sup>91</sup> Most of the overlanders passing Kilmore were apparently 'without sixpence in their pockets, or even a day's provisions', and the Melbourne press thought many were 'vile and worthless' members of society who would not be missed.<sup>92</sup> Indeed, a drop in police cases seemed to confirm this view, and the *Geelong Advertiser* happily announced 'the desperadoes at all events are off'.<sup>93</sup> On 11 June, Governor FitzRoy reflected that California had drawn off 'a vast number of desperate and unruly characters', who might have been 'exceedingly troublesome and difficult to deal with', had they stayed in Sydney.<sup>94</sup> Unfortunately for Sydney, those on their way from Port Phillip included 'some of the most notorious scoundrels in the province' and 'many of the recently imported Van Diemonians'.<sup>95</sup> The Melbourne *Herald* thought 'these we can well afford to spare; and it is some consolation to find that if we lose, we also gain'.<sup>96</sup> When the overlanders reached Gundagai, it was observed: 'from all appearance Port Phillip must be emptying itself very fast ... but if we may judge from the physiognomy of many, the province of Victoria will be well quit of a multitude of blackguards'.<sup>97</sup> If people were leaving, Melbourne was happy for them to go.

When a party of about 30 'able strong working men' supposedly set out ill-prepared for the journey to Sydney on 4 June, the *Argus* thought, 'If men will be silly enough to go, it is far better to go properly'.<sup>98</sup> But any concern about people leaving Melbourne for Sydney was more than balanced by the excitement caused by reports of discoveries closer to home. By 6 June, the *Argus* thought up to 200 may have left Melbourne by foot for Bathurst, but also reported another 300 going to the Plenty

River to look for local gold.<sup>99</sup> Describing the beginning of the 1851 rushes in *The Golden Age*, Serle mentioned 200 going to Sydney and hundreds searching locally, but gave prominence to contemporary pessimistic and alarmist views, such as McCombie's talk of 'impending ruin'.<sup>100</sup> After stating that 'a large number of people' went to Sydney, Cranfield claimed 'there were many who were unable to go and various efforts were made to discover the precious metal locally'.<sup>101</sup> Maybe so, but it seems likely that many in Melbourne had no desire to leave and believed local goldfields would soon be opened anyway. Dr Webb Richmond had no doubt gold could be 'obtained from all the rivers and creeks having their rise in the Pyrenees, Yarra and Plenty Ranges'.<sup>102</sup> Likewise, a Sydney correspondent said, 'I think the best advice is to *sow grain, and explore the country*; for depend upon it, gold abounds in Port Phillip in as great quantities as it does here.'<sup>103</sup> As early as 5 June, the *Geelong Advertiser* had decided 'the colony is mineral mad'—not about Bathurst, but about gold 'here, there and everywhere' in Port Phillip.<sup>104</sup> As Darby Callagan [sic] said, 'I intend to stay home' and make more money by selling goods to gold seekers who could find gold locally in the Plenty Ranges.<sup>105</sup>

Nevertheless, reports from Sydney continued to malign Port Phillip. On 6 June, the *Empire* predicted: 'Van Demonian expirees and Victorian scapegraces' would soon arrive to take the gold 'by force of arms'.<sup>106</sup> By 14 June, the *Sydney Morning Herald* claimed Melbourne had suffered a 'stagnation in business'; land purchasers had forfeited their deposits; Geelong was about to be deserted; and one hundred passengers were on sailing vessels headed for Sydney.<sup>107</sup> In her study of Victorian newspapers, Elizabeth Morrison observed, 'From May Geelong papers had reported the goldrush to Bathurst in New South Wales, predicting local depopulation.'<sup>108</sup> On the contrary, the *Geelong Advertiser* had responded indignantly to Sydney taunts by saying, 'Geelong still stands where it did, and it is likely to do so ... not a dozen individuals have left town; the gold mania is very much abated.'<sup>109</sup> The *Daily News* pointed out that the number of land deposit forfeitures was 'inconsiderable'.<sup>110</sup> By contrast, a few days earlier, the *Sydney Morning Herald* was not too concerned when it observed that New South Wales itself was suffering a 'temporary stagnation' of business.<sup>111</sup> Yet, a month later, business in Sydney had reached 'perfect stagnation'.<sup>112</sup>

Notwithstanding the embellished accounts, the number of passengers to Sydney did increase significantly during June, although the frequent postponing of departure dates suggests the filling of berths and loading of

cargo was not as rapid as speculating shipowners hoped. The reminders to passengers to pay their fares may suggest that it was those short of cash who saw most attraction in rushing off to Bathurst, despite press warnings that gold seeking was ‘worse than gambling’ and ‘the most disadvantageous lottery in the world’.<sup>113</sup>

The brig *Diana*, a regular on the Sydney to Melbourne route with cargo and up to 22 passengers, started advertising on 31 May intending to sail on 4 June. It sailed on 8 June with 26 passengers. The *Prince of Wales* variously served Melbourne, Geelong and New Zealand, usually carrying between four and 13 passengers. It began advertising on 4 June, intending to sail on 9 June, and left Melbourne on the eleventh with 46. In July, it brought 11 back to Melbourne, and returned to Sydney from Geelong with only two passengers. The *Esperanza* normally served Melbourne and Hobart and was diverted to Sydney for a single voyage. It advertised from 3 June, intending to depart on 7 June, and, after several delays, left Melbourne on 12 June with 14 passengers. The *Christina*, a regular, usually carried cargo and a few passengers. It began advertising on 2 June; scheduled to sail for Sydney on 7 June; was sold on 6 June; and left for Sydney on 14 June with 70 passengers.<sup>114</sup> The schooner *Adelaide* usually served the Hobart route with up to eight passengers. It arrived from Hobart on 1 June, but on 5 June, the Master advertised, ‘Gold! Gold! For the Gold Country (Sydney) Direct’ departing on 6 June—‘If sufficient inducement offer.’<sup>115</sup> After several postponements, he sailed on 14 June with 25 passengers before returning to the Hobart run.<sup>116</sup> The *Phoebe*, also a regular to Sydney, usually with around 12 passengers, arrived at Melbourne on 3 June, intending to depart again on 11 June. It left on 16 June with 32 passengers.<sup>117</sup> The brig *Dart* usually carried cargo, and 20 or 30 passengers. After taking 20 to Sydney in May, its next sailing was delayed for nearly three weeks when the captain decided to ‘fit her out as a passenger vessel only’.<sup>118</sup> When it sailed on 28 June, there were 102 passengers.<sup>119</sup> By contrast, the next voyage took only 12.<sup>120</sup> The brigantine *Elizabeth* was a regular trader on the Melbourne to Adelaide route, normally carrying between 16 and 26 passengers. It arrived in Sydney on the same day as the *Dart* with eight passengers.<sup>121</sup> Returning to Melbourne with 10 passengers, it then resumed the Adelaide trade.<sup>122</sup> Other ships, such as the schooner *Swordfish*, a Hobart regular, advertised for Sydney but did not sail.<sup>123</sup>

A Sydney correspondent wrote on 20 June that there were ‘some thousands at the diggings, and a great many who came from Port Phillip in

the last vessels'.<sup>124</sup> In fact, the only ships to arrive before 20 June were the *Wanderer* from Geelong on 1 June with eight passengers, and the *Hirondelle* on 17 June with 16—including military personnel and family groups.<sup>125</sup> The *Esperanza*, *Adelaide*, *Phoebe*, *Christina*, *Diana*, and *Don Juan* arrived at Sydney over the weekend of 21 and 22 June with 215 passengers, and the *Sydney Morning Herald* reported 'two hundred and forty passengers' had arrived, and somehow decided that 200 were expected to head for the goldfields.<sup>126</sup> The writer of the 20 June letter added a postscript on 23 June—'four vessels have arrived from Port Phillip, bringing 200 passengers who intend to go to the mines'.<sup>127</sup> Another correspondent suggested only 100 were intending to go the goldfields.<sup>128</sup> The *Herald* optimistically added that 'one hundred additional passengers' were on their way from Melbourne and 'the *Shamrock* ... due tomorrow afternoon will be crowded'.<sup>129</sup> They would have been disappointed when the *Shamrock* arrived with only 31 passengers.

The total number of passengers arriving in Sydney from Port Phillip during June was around 410, an increment of perhaps 280 on the monthly average. Certainly it was a significant increase, but was it an 'exodus' and did it cause 'panic'? As a proportion of the total population, several hundred going to Sydney was no greater than when 300 were reported to have left Melbourne in February 1849 for the Pyrenees, and the population had nearly doubled since then. In January 1848, the population of Melbourne was estimated at about 11,000.<sup>130</sup> Eight thousand new emigrants arrived at Port Phillip between January and September 1849 alone.<sup>131</sup> The census of March 1851 showed the population of the city to be 23,143 and for the whole district, 77,345. Several hundred in this population is less significant than the same number at the beginning of 1849.

On 15 June, the *Sea Belle* arrived at Port Phillip from Leith carrying mainly cargo. It was then laid on for Sydney, but postponed its departure on several occasions and finally sailed on 12 July. At £5 for cabins and £2 10 for intermediate berths, its fares were half those of the *Shamrock*.<sup>132</sup> On 21 July, the *Sydney Empire* announced, 'The two vessels *Gazelle* and *Sea Belle*, which arrived yesterday, the former from Adelaide, and the latter from Victoria, brought no less than one hundred and forty-two passengers. This is sufficiently indicative of the interest which the gold discovery has created among our neighbours. It is feared that Victoria will be completely deserted.'<sup>133</sup> It was another example of Sydney trying to pour scorn on Victoria and *Bell's Life* predicted that Port Phillip would soon be seeking

‘reunion with the Middle District’.<sup>134</sup> But the *Empire* failed to mention that 112 passengers came from Adelaide, and only 30 from Melbourne.<sup>135</sup> Just as the reaction in Port Phillip was sometimes exaggerated, the *Sydney Morning Herald* complained that the ‘most exaggerated reports have circulated in the neighbouring colonies respecting the effects of the gold discovery’, and admitted some facts may be ‘rather too highly coloured’.<sup>136</sup>

### **Political and business reactions**

Highly coloured also was the language used by later historians. Robyn Annear suggested: ‘After a month of watching his city in panic, Melbourne’s mayor called a meeting. The town’s leading men all agreed that only a goldfield of its own could save Victoria from annihilation.’<sup>137</sup> ‘Annihilation’ had been added to ‘panic’ and ‘exodus’! In fact, the request for a meeting was drawn up by Melbourne auctioneer Asher Hymen Hart, who obtained the signatures of 77 businessmen on 3 June—two weeks, not a month, after the Bathurst news was received, and before most of the ships had even advertised for Sydney.<sup>138</sup> Only 15 of those who signed were members of the Victoria Industrial Society, which had 230 members, and represented a more influential group of the district’s businessmen.<sup>139</sup> Six months earlier, long before news of Bathurst, the Victoria Industrial Society had supported George Bruhn’s plans to survey the Macedon and Pyrenees Ranges. Bruhn had already confirmed local gold deposits, and during the week before the petition was drawn up, impressive amounts of local gold had been sold in Melbourne, causing ‘much excitement’ and reinforcing the long-held belief that gold was to be found in many places in the district.<sup>140</sup> Indeed, on 26 May, a Geelong correspondent revealed that he knew certain squatters near the Pyrenees had found gold, but understood their reluctance to reveal details.

It is quite natural that these gentlemen should conceal the fact of its existing on their stations ... [nevertheless] ... it would be a piece of madness for us to start off for foreign goldfields, when we can dig away at our own. ... Perhaps the prospect of a serious rise in the labour market may induce any one possessed of a knowledge of gold localities here, to throw out, a hint on the subject.<sup>141</sup>

Hart’s original petition said those who signed wanted to promote local goldfields, because they were ‘deeply concerned’ that the ‘working population’ should ‘forego their desire to emigrate to any neighbouring colony’. That was good patriotic language, but so far, there had been no



general exodus and the concern was not universal.<sup>142</sup> A few days earlier, when signatory George Boursiquot, editor of the *Daily News*, wrote about a possible 'labour famine', the *Geelong Advertiser* responded: 'Our contemporary is unnecessarily alarmed. Everybody will not flock to the "diggings" and we are sure to obtain an influx of labour.'<sup>143</sup> A pro-Melbourne Sydney correspondent attributed negative reports to 'ill-natured people' who 'laugh at Port Phillip' and correctly predicted that 'very few people will desert their prospects' to go to Sydney.<sup>144</sup>

Although many members of the Victoria Industrial Society attended the meeting on 9 June, not all had signed the petition, and not all agreed on what should be done, or the need to do anything.<sup>145</sup> As the *Lyttleton Times* observed, 'the opinions expressed were of a contradictory character'.<sup>146</sup> Three town councillors, Thomas McCombie, editor of the *Gazette*; John Hodgson, Studley Park squatter; and John Pascoe Fawkner, owner of the Pascoe Vale estate and original pioneer of Melbourne, expressed the most pessimistic views. But when they said something had to be done to 'save this half fallen city and its citizens from the impending ruin which now hung over it', or that Bathurst was 'likely to have an exceedingly disastrous effect upon this city', we must ask whether they, as candidates for the new Legislative Council, were simply politicians playing to the crowd.

Another councillor and recent Mayor of Melbourne, Augustus Greeves, who was also a doctor, publican, one-time editor of both the *Gazette* and *Herald*, and a supporter of separation who generally agreed with McCombie, said that, on this occasion, he 'did not entertain any such despondent feeling,' and others were optimistic about the prospects for Port Phillip.<sup>147</sup> Indeed, on the morning of the meeting, the *Argus* said 'the amount of injury is apt to be very much overrated', and 'the dread of the entire desertion of servants is equally unfounded'.<sup>148</sup> The *Geelong Advertiser* agreed: 'Our anticipations are anything but gloomy. We feel assured that rapid progress in prosperity will be the early result.'<sup>149</sup>

The resolution put to the meeting was to offer a reward to 'any person or persons who shall disclose ... a gold mine or deposit, capable of being profitably worked within a distance of 200 miles of the city'—no mention was made of an exodus of workers. Asher Hart also privately petitioned the Town Council to approach the government 'to encourage scientific men to prosecute the search for gold' and again made no mention of a migration of workers.<sup>150</sup> Several speakers, including John Pascoe Fawkner and John Hodgson, wanted to extend the reward to include lead, copper, and coal.

Indeed, a year earlier, in May 1850, the Melbourne Coal Company offered an identical £200 reward to any person who could identify a workable coalfield ‘within a reasonable distance of Melbourne or Geelong’.<sup>151</sup> Now, if gold was to be legally mined near Bathurst, it was clearly time for a reward to be offered to any person who would ‘make known the locality of a Gold Mine capable of being worked to advantage’ in Port Phillip.<sup>152</sup> The discovery had already happened; it was the ‘making known’ that was needed, and when the reward was advertised on 11 June, the wording included the peculiarly Biblical phrase, ‘to discover to them’, meaning to reveal to them, a payable gold deposit.<sup>153</sup> As a correspondent said a week earlier, the ‘very best plan would be to make known some of our own gold fields, which it is understood are locked up in the breasts of certain individuals’.<sup>154</sup>

Of the 17-member Gold Committee, eight were members of the Victoria Industrial Society, and several were candidates for the impending Legislative Council elections. Only one candidate, John Hodgson, specifically referred to gold in his election manifesto, when he promised to encourage ‘such measures on the part of the Government, as shall lead to the development of the mineral resources of this colony, with a view to the prevention of those fluctuations in the population, which such discoveries are apt to produce’.<sup>155</sup> Augustus Greeves, also a candidate, told those at the 9 June meeting that he did not share their concerns, and the *Geelong Advertiser* had warned a week earlier of ‘the baneful effects of the “aurophobia.” A check to progress is felt, not IN CONSEQUENCE of any result from the discovery of gold, but FROM FEAR of the consequences’.<sup>156</sup>

Sometimes personal letters can be more reliable than anonymous press stories, but not always.<sup>157</sup> In August 1851, James Butchart, who worked for Campbell, wrote to his father in England and said: ‘If a vessel is going to Sydney the notice of her sailing is headed *Gold*.’<sup>158</sup> In fact, between the end of May and the end of July, there were only three ship advertisements using the word ‘Gold’, and none were the regular vessels. On 5 June, the schooner *Adelaide* advertised with the slogan, ‘Gold! Gold! For the Gold Country (Sydney) Direct’, and did not advertise again.<sup>159</sup> Likewise, between 29 May and 7 June, the *Don Juan* announced, ‘To the Gold’.<sup>160</sup> ‘GOLD! GOLD! GOLD!’ was used to advertise the schooner *Pilot* at the end of June—but it was sailing ‘For Hobart Town Direct’—not for Sydney.<sup>161</sup> The *Emma* arrived in Melbourne on 26 July with 16 passengers. It first advertised the return trip to Sydney without mention of gold and included

the 'GOLD! GOLD! GOLD!' slogan only after George Bruhn used the same words to promote his lecture on 'the discovery of gold and other valuable minerals in Victoria'.<sup>162</sup> Indeed, throughout June, the slogan 'GOLD! GOLD! GOLD!' was mainly used to advertise land sales in the Plenty Ranges. At the end of June, the Queen's Theatre Royal advertised its latest drama, *The Gold Seekers*—'GOLD GOLD GOLD!!! Come and see what you may expect at the Diggings, ROBBERY AND MURDER!! The Gold Seekers at half price.'<sup>163</sup> The claim that ships to Sydney were invariably using the 'Gold' slogan is another of the exaggerated accounts to come from the gold excitement.

By the end of June, news of gold discoveries in Port Phillip dominated the headlines and the *Sydney Morning Herald* retaliated with an editorial claiming the reaction in Port Phillip had been 'aggravated by feelings of jealousy and alarm'; that Victoria had been accustomed to 'look down on New South Wales as inferior to themselves'; that the justifiable prosperity and attraction of Port Phillip had been wrongly enhanced by 'false representations' that New South Wales had 'reached a crisis'; and now, 'unwilling to yield the palm without a struggle', Victorians had gone out to 'ransack their hills and gullies in all directions in the quest for gold'. The *Herald* claimed 'hundreds are already on the move' to Bathurst, and they would be 'followed by hundreds and thousands more'.<sup>164</sup>

But the migration of people to Bathurst that some feared, and that Sydney hoped for, did not eventuate, and shipowners soon sold their vessels or returned them to their usual duties. The *Emma Prescott* arrived back at Melbourne on 13 July with four listed passengers.<sup>165</sup> It sailed again for Sydney on 23 July with 21, and was then sold before heading to San Francisco.<sup>166</sup> The *Emma* sailed from Melbourne on 8 August with 20 passengers—significantly short of the 30 it brought back in November—it was then advertised 'for sale, freight or charter'.<sup>167</sup> Early in August, the *Gazelle* and *Sea Belle* both sailed for Newcastle to load with coal destined for Adelaide and Launceston.

On Tuesday 1 July 1851, the Port Phillip District was officially separated from New South Wales and became known as Victoria. Robyn Annear suggests that 'though the celebrations boasted all the usual feasts and fireworks, their gusto was subdued by the blight of Sydney gold'.<sup>168</sup> But was Melbourne quite as despondent as Annear suggests? On 1 July, David Hill Young wrote a letter to England telling of George Bruhn's finds in the Pyrenees: 'The gold is said to exist in large quantities, and the diggers are now preparing to go there, thinking that they will stand a better chance

than at Bathurst, where so many have preceded them. There are explorers out in all directions looking for gold in this district.’ On the negative side, Young added, ‘There is a great fear that many of the shepherds will desert the sheep, and follow gold as the most profitable labour.’<sup>169</sup> Not to Bathurst, but to the Pyrenees.

Many later accounts suggest, as did Edwin Booth, that ‘before the end of July 1851, the gold-fever raged in Melbourne’, but, on 25 July, the *Argus* gave a contradictory assessment: ‘The Gold Fever has considerably abated—the crisis is past.’ Not only was it past, but ‘for some weeks, the ordinary business of the colony has been going on as quietly as if the Australian gold fields had never been heard of’. Indeed, the *Argus* never thought there was a crisis, apart from in the minds of a few ‘alarmists’, and reactions in general became more restrained. ‘Hopes are less bright—fears are less gloomy—the mind’s eye of the public is less dazzled by the golden glare—and the subject can now be discussed somewhat rationally and calmly.’ The attention of the *Argus* turned to the fact that local gold had been confirmed and that ‘there must be some better regulations promulgated for the workings than those of our neighbours. And to this, the serious consideration of our own Government cannot be too soon directed’.<sup>170</sup> Not wanting to hold back the gold seekers, the *Argus* published precise directions for how to get to the Pyrenees goldfields, and added ‘it may be as well to mention that it is within eight miles of the spot where the shepherd found the specimen of gold which caused such a sensation a few years back’.<sup>171</sup>

La Trobe knew that. He had visited the Pyrenees gold region at least twice since 1849, and was there when Donald Cameron and William Campbell found gold at Clunes in March 1850.<sup>172</sup> But opening local goldfields was not a wise thing to do in 1849, 1850 or 1851. There were too many unreliable and unpredictable ex-convicts and exiles in the district; there was a much greater need to open a local coal mine to supply industry and transport; it would be better to wait until the new Colony of Victoria had a fully functioning legislature and an efficient police force; and it was unwise to open a goldfield while Port Phillip was still part of New South Wales and the revenue would flow to Sydney. Even *Bell’s Life in Sydney* could see that when it assumed in February 1849 that the Port Phillip gold would ‘not be procured in any large quantities, until the “Act of Separation” be passed’.<sup>173</sup>

The news from Bathurst strengthened longstanding calls to open local goldfields in Port Phillip, and once that was done, La Trobe knew full well, it would be like opening Pandora's box. Indeed, when the *Melbourne Morning Herald* called for the opening of the Port Phillip goldfields in mid-June, it acknowledged that La Trobe was 'personally averse to gold discoveries, and would regard the finding of a gold mine as a national calamity'.<sup>174</sup> But, as La Trobe observed three months later—'had the position of the new colony been a more settled and favourable one, had it possessed the power of a timely and firm legislation ... a much more satisfactory system for the working of the gold-fields ... might and ought to have been set on foot from the very outset'.<sup>175</sup>

By December 1851, despite its longstanding hostility toward La Trobe, the *Argus* was surprisingly optimistic.

We do not consider the present state of things very terrible. Some inconveniences are felt, and some loss will have to be submitted to. Wonderful, indeed, would it be, if such discoveries could take place without producing temporarily such effect! ... The discovery is doubtless intended for ultimate good, and we are quite prepared; individually, to take our chance. There may be men so circumstanced as not to be able to keep pace with the times, and to these the Gold fields may bring nothing but disaster, but we would fain hope that they are but few in number. To the great bulk of the community the discovery will, undoubtedly, bring solid and material advantage ... we hail the gold discovery as calculated to prove of inestimable value to these Colonies; and in the hopeful contemplation of such mighty advantages, we can cheerfully enough submit, for the present, to such minor grievances as scarce servants, thirty shilling loads of wood, or a sixteen-penny loaf.<sup>176</sup>

By the end of 1851, talk in Sydney had changed from Bathurst to Port Phillip—'Have you heard anything about the Port Phillip diggings? ... What do you think of the news from Port Phillip?'<sup>177</sup> The real exodus was about to begin—not to Bathurst, but to Victoria. By December, the tide had turned, and the *Sydney Morning Herald* reflected:

With the opening of summer, the tide of Emigration set in with a rapidity scarcely less than our worst apprehensions. Every vessel that left our harbour for Port Phillip was crowded with steerage passengers. Mount Alexander bade fair to decimate even Sydney. Nor were these departures compensated by arrivals from England, the rage for emigration from that country being chiefly directed to what was generally believed to be by far the richest of the gold-producing colonies. New South Wales was comparatively forgotten, or remembered only as a star of inferior magnitude.<sup>178</sup>

As William Morrell put it, Bathurst was a 'mere prologue to the Australian gold rushes'.<sup>179</sup>

Two years later, in October 1853, Augustus Greeves chaired a Legislative Council Select Committee investigating claims for the first gold discovery in Victoria. Its membership included many who had been on the 1851 Gold Committee, and they acknowledged that the 1849 discoveries had created a 'strong and prevalent impression' that extensive gold deposits existed in Victoria, and that the 1851 meeting had been called due to 'apprehension', rather than any reality of a 'draining off of our population'. The Select Committee concluded: 'Nor is it probable that the migration to the Sydney district would have been more than temporary, even had the Victorian diggings not been discovered.'<sup>180</sup> This was a reasonable conclusion, but in a decision that the *Geelong Advertiser* claimed was 'a disgrace' and displayed 'gross partisanship', the Committee changed its draft report to include a statement by William Campbell, who was 'powerfully backed in the Committee by Melbourne interests and private friends'.<sup>181</sup> Campbell wrote a last minute letter to James Graham, claiming that in June 1851 he decided to make public his March 1850 discovery of gold at Clunes, after observing 'the migration of the population to New South Wales, and the panic created throughout the whole Colony, and especially Melbourne'.<sup>182</sup>

Campbell had good reason to embellish his motives for making the Clunes discovery public. He had been widely criticised for keeping the discovery secret for eighteen months to protect the interests of the squatters, and, in December 1852, La Trobe had refused to support his claim to being the first to discover gold in Victoria.<sup>183</sup> La Trobe believed that honour belonged to the shepherd, Thomas Chapman, who made the 1849 discovery.<sup>184</sup> Indeed, Henry Frencham, who had also made a claim for the 1851 reward, later stated that Alexandre Duchene had revealed Chapman's gold 'long before Mr Hargraves' discovery' and, therefore, deserved to be recognised as first discoverer of gold.<sup>185</sup> Nevertheless, Campbell's words 'panic' and 'migration' found their way into the Select Committee report, and then to the accounts of later historians, who, like Cranfield, almost without question, accepted them as a suitably dramatic way to sum up Melbourne's reaction to Bathurst.<sup>186</sup>

The 'sudden exodus of the population in Melbourne to the gold diggings' at Bathurst in May and June 1851 did not happen in the way that has been suggested by many.<sup>187</sup> Such were the words of 'chattering alarmists' and 'prophets of evil'. But people like a good story, especially if it

contains sensation, panic and the mass exodus of people—and ‘panic’ and ‘exodus’ were sensational words to use when later historians tried to reduce months of complex events down to a sentence or two. And those words were passed on to others—after all, as the *Argus* said at the time, ‘Nothing is so contagious as panic’.<sup>188</sup>

## NOTES

- 1 ‘Report of the Select Committee of the Legislative Council on the Claims for the Discovery of Gold in Victoria, together with the Proceeding of Committee, Minutes of Evidence, and Appendix, 10 March 1854’, *Votes and Proceedings of the Legislative Council during the Session 1853–1854*, vol. iii, Melbourne, 1854, pp. 4, 10–12; hereafter 1854 Select Committee.
- 2 La Trobe to Grey, 10 October 1851, *House of Commons Parliamentary Papers* (HCPP), 1852 (1430) (1508).
- 3 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 March 1851, p. 6.
- 4 *Argus*, 8 April 1851, p. 2.
- 5 *Argus*, 10 April 1851, p. 2.
- 6 *Argus*, 11 April 1851, p. 2.
- 7 For example, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 April 1851, p. 2; *Empire*, 4 April 1851, p. 3; *Melbourne Times* quoted in *Geelong Advertiser*, 12 April 1851, p. 2.
- 8 *Geelong Advertiser*, 16 April 1851, p. 2.
- 9 *Bell's Life in Sydney*, 19 April 1851, p. 3; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 April 1851, p. 3.
- 10 *Argus*, 6 May 1851, p. 2.
- 11 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 May 1851, p. 3; *Empire*, 7 May 1851, p. 2.
- 12 *Geelong Advertiser*, 7 May 1851, p. 2; *Argus*, 8 May 1851, p. 2; *Geelong Advertiser*, 12 May 1851, p. 1.
- 13 *Argus*, 13 May 1851, p. 2; *Geelong Advertiser*, 14 May 1851, p. 1.
- 14 *Argus*, 17 May 1851, p. 4.
- 15 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 May 1851, p. 3; 16 May 1851, p. 2; *Empire*, 17 May 1851, p. 2.
- 16 *Argus*, 20 May 1851, p. 2; *Melbourne Morning Herald*, 21 May 1851, p. 2.
- 17 *Argus*, Friday 23 May 1851, p. 2.
- 18 *Melbourne Morning Herald*, 23 May 1851, p. 2; *Empire*, 17 May 1851, p. 2.
- 19 *Empire*, 23 May 1851, p. 3.
- 20 *Argus*, 24 May 1851, p. 2; *Melbourne Morning Herald*, 24 May 1851, p. 2; *Empire*, 24 May 1851, p. 3.
- 21 *Argus*, 23 May 1851, p. 2.

- 22 *Geelong Advertiser*, 27 May 1851, p. 2.
- 23 *Argus*, 26 May 1851, p. 2; Louis Cranfield, 'The First Discovery of Gold in Victoria', *Victorian Historical Magazine*, vol. xxxi, no. 2, November 1960, p. 91, incorrectly gives 26 April 1851 as the date of the publication of this news.
- 24 *Melbourne Morning Herald*, 26 May 1851, p. 2.
- 25 Graeme Davison, 'Gold-rush Melbourne', in Iain McCalman, Alexander Cook and Andrew Reeves (eds), *Gold—Forgotten Histories and Lost Objects of Australia*, Melbourne, Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 52.
- 26 For example, the following authors use the words 'panic' or 'exodus' without providing any argument to support the assessment: G.W. Rusden, *History of Australia*, 2nd ed. Melbourne, Melville, Mullen & Slade, p. 608; Geoff Atkinson, *Mary Proctor: Convict, Pioneer and Settler*, Sydney, Rosenberg, 2005, p. 138; John Molony, *Eureka*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1984, p. 7; Kenneth Kutz, *Gold Fever*, Connecticut, Gold Fever Publishing, 1988, p. 77; Robyn Annear, *Nothing But Gold*, Melbourne, Text Publishing, 1999, p. 7; Sally Graham, *Pioneer Merchant: the Letters of James Graham 1839–1854*, Melbourne, Hyland House, 1985, p. 221; Cranfield, p. 91; Geoffrey Serle, *The Golden Age*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1963, p. 9, cites Cranfield as authoritative, and describes 'impending ruin'; Garryowen (Edmund Finn), *The Chronicles of Early Melbourne 1835–1852*, Melbourne, Fergusson and Mitchell, 1888, p. 817.
- 27 David Goodman, *Gold Seeking: Victoria and California in the 1850s*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1994, pp. xxviii, 188–219.
- 28 For a discussion of the 'excitement' aroused by gold, see Goodman, *Gold Seeking*, Chapter 6.
- 29 *Geelong Advertiser*, 31 May 1851, p. 2.
- 30 For a full discussion of the convict issue, see Douglas Wilkie, 'The Convict Ship Hashemy at Port Phillip: a Case Study in Historical Error', *Victorian Historical Journal*, vol. 85, no. 1, June 2014, pp. 31–53.
- 31 For a full discussion of the political and financial issues leading to separation, see Douglas Wilkie, '1849 the Rush That Never Started: Forgotten Origins of the 1851 Gold Discoveries in Victoria', PhD thesis, University of Melbourne, 2014, pp. 239–247.
- 32 *Port Phillip Herald*, 8 May 1840; A.G.L. Shaw, 'Separation and Federation,' *Victorian Historical Journal*, vol. 68, no. 1, April, 1997, p. 7; A.G.L. Shaw, *A History of the Port Phillip District: Victoria Before Separation*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 2003, p. 238; John Dunmore Lang, *Phillipsland; or the Country Hitherto Designated Port Phillip*, London, Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1847, p. 46; Gipps to Stanley, 31 January 1841, cited in *Argus*, 17 July 1846, p. 2.
- 33 *Argus*, 8 July 1851, p. 4; *Perth Gazette*, 13 June 1851, p. 3; 'Daily News' in *Geelong Advertiser*, 12 July 1851, p. 2.
- 34 *Argus*, 4 June 1851, p. 2.
- 35 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 June 1851, p. 2.
- 36 *Bell's Life*, 14 June 1851, p. 2.



- 37 *Bell's Life*, 10 February 1849, p. 2.
- 38 For a comprehensive and detailed investigation of the 1849 discovery and its consequences, see Douglas Wilkie, '1849 The Rush That Never Started'.
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- 41 *Argus*, 9 June 1851, p. 2.
- 42 *Argus*, 9 June 1851, p. 2.
- 43 *Geelong Advertiser*, 24 May 1851, p. 2.
- 44 *Geelong Advertiser*, 29 May 1851, p. 2.
- 45 *Geelong Advertiser*, 31 May 1851, p. 2.
- 46 *Argus*, 9 June 1851, p. 2.
- 47 'Melbourne Times', in *Geelong Advertiser*, 6 June 1851, p. 2.
- 48 *Geelong Advertiser*, 29 May 1851, p. 2.
- 49 'Melbourne Times', in *Geelong Advertiser*, 6 June 1851, p. 2.
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- 51 'The Gold Mania', *Melbourne Morning Herald*, 7 June 1851, p. 2.
- 52 *Argus*, 4 June 1851, p. 2.
- 53 *Melbourne Morning Herald*, 7 June 1851, p. 2.
- 54 *Argus*, 9 June 1851, p. 2.
- 55 *Maitland Mercury*, 7 June 1851, p. 3.
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**Title:**

Exodus and Panic? : Melbourne's reaction to the Bathurst gold discoveries of May 1851

**Date:**

2014-12-01

**Citation:**

WILKIE, DS, Exodus and Panic? : Melbourne's reaction to the Bathurst gold discoveries of May 1851, Victorian Historical Journal, 2014, 85 (2), pp. 189 - 218

**Persistent Link:**

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**File Description:**

Exodus and Panic? : Melbourne's reaction to the Bathurst gold discoveries of May 1851