



# WARRANDYTE HISTORICAL SOCIETY Inc.

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## GOLD MINING IN WARRANDYTE - A BRIEF HISTORY.

Revised and enlarged from an earlier Warrandyte Historical Society document  
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In 1839, one of the earliest settlers in Warrandyte, James Anderson, established a cattle and sheep station in the area just West of the present town of Warrandyte, and he erected a stockyard and hut near where Anderson's Creek joined the Yarra. In recognition of that fact, Anderson's Creek became the name of the district's early settlement. However, when T.H. Nutt surveyed the area South of the Yarra in early 1841, he ascribed the district to be the Parish of Warran-Dyte, County of Bourke, and when the township was laid out by surveyor Clement Hodgkinson in 1856 his ground plan bore the title Township of Warrandyte, County of Evelyn. In subsequent years the area was known, confusedly, by both names. It was not until 1908 that the name of Warrandyte became formalised, following petitions from the Warrandyte Progress Association and other prominent local inhabitants.

Today it is well known that Louis John Michel, in company with William Habberlin and four other companions including the prominent Melbourne jeweller Benjamin Greening, discovered gold in June 1851, on the banks of Anderson's Creek. It is popularly believed that this was the first official discovery of a gold field in the State of Victoria. However, according to the 1869 history compiled by Edwin Carton Booth, it was in 1841 that James Anderson and his associate Sharp, both of whom were early settlers from Tasmania, had already found gold near the confluence of Anderson's Creek with the Yarra, at a spot not far from the diggings opened up ten years afterwards. They said little about the discovery, but collected a small parcel of gold, and consigned it to a business acquaintance in Launceston. This operation they repeated several times, but receiving no account of sales from their friend over the water, they discontinued these pursuits.

When in February 1851 Melbourne {then still a town in New South Wales} received news that Hargraves and Lister had discovered gold near Bathurst, the population {c.77,000} became depleted dramatically. In the coming months clerks, the unemployed, station hands, salesmen, artisans, tradesmen and labourers alike, departed "in scores" for auriferous regions North of the Murray. In an endeavour to nullify the exodus, the Melbourne's Council {through the aegis of a 'Gold Discovery

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Committee' led by Mayor William Nicholson} offered a Reward {£200.} for supplying "Information of a Payable Gold Field within 200 miles of Melbourne". Stimulus was provided and the search was on!

Michel, proprietor of the "Rainbow Hotel", Swanston Street, Melbourne, and formerly of Surrey, England, was to be one of the two earlier claimants for the reward. On the 5th July 1851, Michel and Habberlin were accompanied to Anderson's Creek by Dr. Webb Richmond, a chemist and member of the "Discovery Committee", to mark the position of their find, and after panning some soil from the Creek bed, Richmond attested to the validity of their discovery. With Michel's specimens, and others supplied from a Clunes source, both officially confirmed as gold by the Committee's nominated assayers, a notice, published in both "*The Argus*" and "*The Melbourne Morning Herald and General Daily Advertiser*" on Thursday 17th July 1851, announced: - "The Committee appointed to promote discovery of a Gold Field in the Colony of Victoria, have the satisfaction of announcing, that unquestionable evidence has been adduced showing the existence of Gold in considerable quantity both at the Deep Creek\* on the Yarra (near Major Newman's run), and also at the Deep Creek on the Pyrenees, ..... etc." {\* Because the region visited by Michel was relatively unknown to the Committee, it confused Deep Creek with Anderson's Creek, where the find had actually been made.} It was then to Anderson's Creek on August 6th, 1851, to which Michel guided a number of Government officials, sundry Committee members, and various prospectors, in order to demonstrate the auriferous nature of his newly found Gold Field. The locality of his discovery was named the Victoria Field in honour of the infant Colony of Victoria, inaugurated on 1st July 1851. {N.B. - The reward offered by the Nicholson Committee was NEVER paid to any of the claimants. They had no money.}

By the middle of August of that year almost 200 diggers were working along the banks and in the bed of the Anderson's Creek, and the surrounding gullies. After a few weeks, and unable to immediately strike it rich, many alluvial diggers were lured away by rumours of the very rich deposits of gold at other locations, Clunes, Ballarat, etc., which were being progressively discovered. Importantly, the Victoria Diggings Gold Field at Anderson's Creek was the first in Victoria to be patrolled by troopers under a Gold Fields Commissioner on the 1st September 1851, and it was also there and then that the first Gold Licences in Victoria were issued. Yet, by December 1851 the area became almost deserted. It was unfortunate that Lieutenant-Governor La Trobe's first inspection of the location did not take place until the following March when the only prospectors still on site were first quartz miners of the district, Messrs. Fletcher and Smith.

Anderson's Creek {in the Parish of Warrandyte} was only one of many Victorian districts which claimed recognition as the 'First Gold Field in Victoria'. To clarify the situation a "Select Committee of the Legislative Assembly of Victoria" was appointed to examine "The Claims Made for the Discovery of Gold of Victoria". Chaired by A.F.A. Greeves, it submitted early in 1854 an exhaustive 35 page report of its findings to Parliament. Among their final deliberations was the clause: - "Your Committee therefore recommend that to Mr. Michel and his party as having, at

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considerable expense, succeeded in discovering and publishing an available Gold Field, the sum of £1,000. should be given." Although Michel's reward money was approved for payment by Parliament on 10th March 1854, limited funds necessitated the first partial instalment {£476. 4s. Od.} be delayed till 29th October 1855; the balance was not sanctioned until June 1861. A memorial cairn dedicated to Louis Michel's discovery was erected in November 1935, and it stands today alongside Anderson's Creek.

Interest in the area was revived in September 1854 when alluvial miners were again prospecting in the creeks and gullies and the River Yarra. A number of accounts of the early attempt to establish a permanent settlement in the Parish of Warrandyte were given in the Melbourne papers during the early months of 1855. The place was by then firmly established as a mining camp, and this period can be looked upon as the beginning of the township.

The township's development of this period is difficult to assess as the population, which sought both alluvial and quartz gold, was largely a floating one. Statistics show that about 1400 itinerant miners were working the hills and gullies from Warrandyte to the Caledonian Gold Field beyond Queenstown; and like the majority of the diggers at that time, they seldom stayed in one locality very long. Unlike the administrative control maintained at other gold fields e.g., at Ballarat, there were neither gold commissioners, troopers nor mining surveyors resident in the district at that time. Gold Fields Warden and Police Magistrate W.C. Brackenbury who was appointed in 1856, and the Bourke District policemen, were mainly located at Queenstown and thus it was impossible to determine what quantities of gold the itinerant prospectors accumulated, or from which location they obtained it. Indeed, from 1852 to 1855 there were no licence fees to pay, for there was no one appointed to collect them.

For the families of the diggers that did stay on in Warrandyte, the first Gold Fields school (or 'tent' school) was established in October 1856, principally at the instigation of William Masterton, the 'Patriarch' of Anderson's Creek, who was the first quartz miner of the First Hill. The Gold Fields Court at Anderson's Creek was also established in 1856, with Brackenbury coming from Queenstown to sit in judgement.

During 1858 Brackenbury was superseded by the enthusiastic C. Warburton Carr. With Carr firmly ensconced at Anderson's Creek as resident Gold Warden and Magistrate, and the district policed by Mounted Constable E. Feathers Dunlap, the Creek's miners and residents received long overdue protection from claim jumping and thefts, and enjoyed sensible administration. Also that year, as a consequence of the establishment of the Mining Districts, the recording of mining licenses and surveyed leases were reinstated, and at Anderson's Creek and districts to the East and North, initially these were the responsibility of the newly-appointed Mining Surveyor for the St. Andrew's Division of the Castlemaine Mining District, James Murphy.

About the end of 1858 many miners, who had briefly made Warrandyte their homes, were more intent on penetrating the forests and prospecting the little known regions of the Upper Yarra and Dandenong Ranges of the new Mining District, than working the difficult-to-crush quartz of the local field. Among them, was the Irish hotelier, Patrick Geraghty, who in 1856 had established one of the Warrandyte miners' favourite watering holes, viz., "Geraghty's Inn", the business of which he commenced in a tent. In November 1858, Geraghty organised one of a number of parties which sojourned in the ranges for months at a time. These parties made valuable contributions to the discovery of the Emerald, Nicholson and Britannia Gold Fields, which extended the new Mining Surveyor's territory even further.

In June 1859, with the intention of tunnelling to broach, and then work a hitherto undiscovered reef - which was believed by many to extend through the Fourth Hill, in a line generally along the Main Warrandyte Anticline - Geraghty, in association with W.S. Moore, registered with Surveyor Murphy, a large claim on the Fourth Hill measuring 600 x 200 metres. Working with the assistance of a light tramway, his tunnel was driven from the East for a distance of 130 metres between June 1859 and February 1860. However, he failed to cross-cut the anticipated lode, and the endeavour was aborted. The tunnel is still in good repair today, and bears Geraghty's name.

Also in 1859 the Yarra Yarra Sluicing Company was busily engaged in diverting the Yarra River, thereby forming a man-made 'Island'. The initial objective of the company was to divert the course of the Yarra River at Thomson's Bend, and thereby allow the bed of its former course situated between Thomson's Pre-Emptive Right and the main road to be dried out and worked for the alluvial gold which had accumulated over the centuries in the detritus. The company ceased operation in 1861, and their 'Island' is a feature of today's landscape.

In the early years, despite many rich quartz specimens having been found over a large area of the district, including e.g., at Masterton's Reef, First Hill, and Geraghty's Reef, Fourth Hill, the latter giving 15 to 20 ounces to the ton, {July 1856}; McAvoy's claim South of Anderson's Creek, Sloan's claim at the Fourth Hill, and Davidson's and Nicholl's Reefs {August 1856}, etc., there was an ever-increasing obstacle to success - the lack of suitable crushing facilities. The miners, who invariably worked in small parties, became frustrated as one newly-installed crushing machine after another proved inadequate to the task. Despite occasional attempts to ship quartz to the crushing facilities of the Langlands foundry in Melbourne {which was too costly}, and the determined efforts by crushing machine suppliers to establish an economically functional facility at Warrandyte, viz., by Richard Capper; Dransfield, Downing and Co.; Macarthur, Hardy and Co.; The Hamburg Company, etc., real success in crushing was not to be achieved there for some years.

During that period a punt carried passengers, livestock, carts, etc., across the river on their way to the Caledonia Diggings, at a site near the back of the old Post Office {today's Museum}. However, traffic had increased to such an extent that the Government decided to erect a permanent