"Return to the Old Paths, and We Shall yet be Happy Again": Jewish Women on the Central Victorian Goldfields, Australia, 1870-1900[1]

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Abstract: On the Central Victorian Goldfields, new expressions of faith and religiosity were created for Jewish women. As British Colonial Evangelical ideas of feminine domesticity were incorporated into traditional Judaism, the practices, worship, and religiosity of Jewish women were altered, turning them from silent synagogue observers to vocal contributors and religious familial leaders. This transformation has remained unexplored in the Australian Jewish historical literature. This article is one of the first studies into the shifting religious practices, synagogue role, and identity of Jewish women on the Central Victorian Goldfields, giving greater voice and scope to the religious and cultural change of an often-forgotten section of the goldfields Jewish community.

> *"I give you pain—I who would willingly die for you?"*
>
> *"Yes, a thousand times yes. If God demands our child we must humbly submit, but how can I bear the thought that you, my dearest, should, through sin, be cut off from your people? O! my husband, love of my girlhood, ever precious to me" (winding her arms fondly around his neck), "return to the old paths, and we shall yet be happy again."*
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> *" What shall I do, my poor Rose? You shall direct, you shall command, and I solemnly swear your wishes shall be my law. Perhaps then I may again see gladness in that face, colour in those cheeks as in the early days. What is your first command?"*
>
> *" To-night is Friday—read me the Sabbath evening service."*
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> *" Truly," said he, looking fondly at his wife, "you are a virtuous woman." (N. S, 1895, "Only a Woman," Jewish Herald, 18 June:13)*

Introduction

An Australian Jewish newspaper in 1895 portrayed a moving home scene where a Jewish wife entreats her husband to return to religious fidelity, or the 'old paths'. The husband, who no longer goes to the synagogue nor studies the religious texts, at last succumbs to the pressure of his wife. Through female influence, enacted in the domestic sphere, the Jewish man has again found his faith. While changing ideas of Jewish women portrayed them as leading lax husbands back into the religious fold, these shifting ideals enabled for them to also find new expressions of religiosity for themselves as well. For the Jewish communities on the Central Victorian Goldfields, pervasive British Evangelical ideals of feminine domesticity were merged with traditional Judaic ideas regarding women's role and status, reconceptualising Jewish womanhood and their place in the synagogue. Historically relegated to the margins of public worship and study, the Jewish

woman had been reworked into the pious domestic angel and religious teacher. Through her influence, she could correct the perceived laxity of colonial Jewry, raising faithful Jewish children and inspiring religious adherence in neglectful husbands. These shifting ideas, as well as the incorporation and reconceptualization of Christian elements into Judaic worship, led to changes in the religious expression, synagogue role, and even possibly the identity of Jewish women in Bendigo and Ballarat in the late nineteenth century. For many, it was simply a further embedding of the cultural and social norms felt and experienced in Britain before their migration to Australia. Religious practices were at times embedded within the social and cultural aspects of the Jewish community, many of whom either were, or aimed to be, part of the wider goldfields middle-class, therefore this article will discuss and include references to these social and cultural elements. As advocated by Paula Hyman (Hyman 2009:54), this research includes persons who were converts to Judaism, those who identified as Jewish, or for whom Jewishness played a meaningful role. While recognising that a Jewish identity includes both racial and religious aspects, this article will focus on the religious and the significant changes which occurred to Jewish women's worship practices. This article will examine the shifting ideas on Jewish women and mothers on the Central Victorian Goldfields from 1870 to 1900, articulating how this might have impacted the religious identity and practices of Jewish women, with a focus on their transformed role in the synagogue.

Through the course of writing this history, a number of limitations were found, the most constraining of which was the lack of personal primary material, of letters, diaries, or memoirs written by Jewish women on the goldfields. There are a number of possible reasons why there is such a dearth of material written by goldfields Jewish women. The persistence of the 'Great Men' thesis of the Victorian goldfields, the focus on successful men, huge gold finds, and dominant institutions has obscured the histories of smaller, less powerful groups (Prentis 2011:198). Jewish women across the second half of the nineteenth century constituted an incredibly small portion of the Central Victorian Goldfields, which lessened the number of persons who could leave behind such material. The Hebrew congregation in Bendigo which is discussed in this article, was disbanded in the early twentieth century with no services, rituals, or gatherings held in the synagogue.[2] In the mid-1920s, the Bendigo synagogue was dismantled, its records moved to an unknown location. While the Ballarat Hebrew congregation and synagogue endured, the number of attendees diminished greatly during the twentieth century, although it did enjoy relatively high numbers during the Second World War. The small number of Jewish women, the fragmented nature of the available records, community movement, and synagogue demolition have likely all contributed to the scarcity of material from goldfields Jewish women themselves. The historian must instead attempt to piece together their lives through other means and sources, must reconstruct a puzzle in which the missing pieces may forever remain hidden. This should not mean, however, that their lives, their practices, and expressions should be relegated to eternal obscurity. Instead, it means we should approach their histories with caution, and acknowledge the uncertainty which accompanies them. This article attempts to piece together the religious lives and changing synagogue practices of Jewish women in Bendigo and Ballarat, and what

this change may have meant for them, to do so, however, requires a degree of informed conjecture, comparison, and postulation. While this process of refashioning the Jewish woman was noted in studies undertaken in Britain and the United States, the Australian literature remains negligible.

Literature Review

Class, gender, and religion have long been areas of interest to historians, however, the literature tends to focus on Christianity. Seminal works such as Leonere Davidoff and Catherine Hall's *Family Fortunes* (1987) cast new light on gender relations and middle- class society, incorporating and discussing how Christian religion influenced British women and men from the late eighteenth to the mid nineteenth century. Davidoff and Hall argued that in the late eighteenth-century, the home, enterprise, femininity, and masculinity had been reconceptualised in such a way as to transform the lives and households of the middling class. The ground-breaking, though at times problematic, work undertaken by Callum Brown (2009) in *The Death of Christian Britain* has also spurred a number of studies which examine women and Christianity (Morgan & deVries 2010; Garnett & Harris 2013:739-758; Aune 2015:122-145; Sharma 2016). One such work inspired by Brown, the edited book *Women, Gender and Religious Cultures in Britain* (Morgan & deVries 2010), was the first published volume to provide a comprehensive overview of women and religion in modern Britain. This research focused overwhelmingly on Christianity, making only brief comments on Jewish women, or how British ideals impacted Jewish womanhood, a phenomenon which other work has clearly shown to have occurred (Burman, 1986). While Christianity has enjoyed much of the scholarly focus, historians in Jewish studies have likewise turned their attention towards gender and religious identity.

Within Australian Jewish studies, the preoccupation of historians with successful men and institutions has seen few studies produced on Jewish women in the nineteenth century. Well-known works such as Newman Rosenthal's *Formula for Survival* (1979), Joseph Aron and Judy Arndt's *The Enduring Remnant* (1992), and Daniel Elazar's *Jewish Frontier Experiences in the Southern Hemisphere* (1983:129-146) have focused on Jewish men and male dominated institutions, which have left little room for the experiences of women. The research produced by Nathan Spielvogel (1927; 1946:350-358) in his histories on the Ballarat Hebrew Congregation included the voices of women, such as when he recorded the oral history of Julia Bernstein, however, his works lack a closer examination into women's changing place in the synagogue and their religious identity. No in-depth study has been undertaken on Jewish women, gender, and religion on the Central Victorian Goldfields, nor has sufficient research been conducted into their changing worship practices in the Victorian colony during the nineteenth century. This research is one of the first in-depth studies on the religiosity of Jewish women who lived on the Central Victorian Goldfields in the late nineteenth century. The limited literature means that the religious practices of Jewish women on the goldfields and their experiences of faith is little understood or even known about. Jewish women have been at the centre of some fascinating Australian studies, although none have focused specifically on the colony of Victoria. Lancia Quay Roselya (2007) examined the religious lives of Jewish women in Sydney from the

mid to late nineteenth century in her doctoral thesis, comparing their experiences to Jewish women in London during the same time period. Seminal Australian Jewish historians such as Suzanne Rutland (1988; 2005) and Hilary Rubinstein (1991) have briefly discussed women in the nineteenth century, weaving their lives into the wider historical narrative of Australian Jewish history. Hilary Rubinstein (1991:10) acknowledged the marginal role of Jewish women in communal organisations, however, she did not discuss the changing ideals surrounding Jewish women in the nineteenth century, nor the new expressions of faith and social class which emerged for female congregants. While the Australian literature requires more research, a significant body of work has been produced internationally. Jewish women have been vigorously researched by international Jewish studies scholars, mainly those in America, in connection to immigration, acculturation, emancipation, and racial persecution (Kaplan 1990:579-606; Weinberg 1988; Berkovits 1990; Drucker 1989; Sinkoff 1988). Significant works on gender and Judaism have been produced, such as Paula E. Hyman's (2017) seminal study *Gender and Assimilation in Modern Jewish History*, which revealed how the assimilation process differed for Jewish women and men, and exposed the inherent tensions in this process for communities and individuals. As well as drawing from the scholarship stated above, this article will build upon the work undertaken by Karla Goldman (2009) on Jewish women in the American synagogue, and from Rickie Burman's (1986) chapter on the changing religious role of migrant Jewish women in Britain as they moved from the periphery to the centre of religious life in the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century. Both authors have demonstrated how acculturation to local Christian society had significant impacts on Jewish women's religiosity, a discussion this article seeks to contribute towards by examining this process on the Central Victorian Goldfields.

Jewish synagogue practices and worship underwent a number of transformations during the long nineteenth century, with family pews, mixed choirs, and organ music introduced into Hebrew congregations across the United States, Britain, and Europe, as well as in smaller Anglo outposts such as the Australian colonies and New Zealand (Cesarani, 1990; Frankel & Zipperstein, 2004; Marrus, 1980; Rozenblit, 1984; Heinze, 1990; Rosenthal, 1960; Encel & Stein, 2003). During the nineteenth century, Jews in England underwent a rapid acculturation, one which Todd Endelman (2002:46) viewed as being more advanced and pronounced than anywhere else in Europe, and which he attributes to a combination of an increasingly liberal society, increased and intensive social contact between Jews and non-Jews, and the voluntary nature of formal religious organisations, patterns of society which were not only present of the Central Victorian Goldfields, but intensified with more contact and even less civil disabilities present. Jews in England had shaped their Jewish religion to fit within English society and their own individual lives, a reconceptualization British Jewish migrants on the Central Victorian Goldfields were likely drawing from. The creation and appointment of a Chief Rabbi of the British Empire in 1845 led to further changes in Jewish religious ritual, worship, and practice, one which was felt across the Anglo-Jewish world, including in the Australian colonies (Rutland, 2006:5). While Reform Judaism did impact Jewish congregations and communities in Prussia (Germany) and the United States, it had a much less noticeably affect in

England and the Australia colonies. Jewish women in England, Prussia (Germany), and the United States during the nineteenth century were likewise affected by acculturation, adopting prevailing Christian narratives of feminine domesticity and heightened female religiosity, which were internalised and expressed through Judaic religious spaces, such as the synagogue (Galchinsky 1998:218; Kaplan 1998:229; Umansky, 1998:338; Abrams, 2006:94,96). A number of scholars in the field have attribute these changes in ritual, worship, and practices to a communal desire to reform and modernise Judaism (Endelman, 2002:167; Roselya, 2007:132; Lipman, 1961:82; Ferris & Greenberg, 2006:6), which this article agrees with. While Jews on the Central Victorians Goldfields, as well as the colony more generally, did adopt a range of Christian practices and ideas as a means to modernise Judaic ritual and worship, they continued to strongly identify with Judaism. While there were certainly congregational members who felt certain reforms to ritual to be inappropriate, public expressions of displeasure at changes to women's role in the synagogue were relatively rare over the period under investigation. The Jewish communities acknowledged that these changes had Christian roots, at times naming the organ as a Christian instrument,[3] however, changes were also discussed as a means of reform and modernisation,[4] of adapting Jewish practices, rituals, and worship to make them more appealing and to boost adherence to services. As one illustrative letter to the editor of the *Jewish Herald* showed, reform in ritual could at times be connected to a perceived increase in Judaic sincerity, as the author argued that "… the *earnest, true, and sincere* Jew will, I believe, agree with me that our orthodox ritual is totally unsuited for our present time [my emphasis]."[5] The author of this letter connected ideas of 'earnest, true, and sincere' Jews and Judaism to reformed and modified ritual practice, demonstrating how changes in Jewish practices, while drawn from the surrounding Christian milieu, could be viewed as demonstrating a Judaic religiosity. This article seeks to understand how Christian practices were internalised by the Jewish communities in Bendigo and Ballarat, how they were used and incorporated into the community and in the synagogue, and the possible affects it had on women's religious practices, lives, and expressions. While it examines their acculturation, arguing that this incorporation transformed the place and practices of Jewish women in the synagogue, it does not intend to postulate that Jews became or viewed themselves as being somehow 'less' Jewish or more 'Christian-like.' The reference to similar Christian practices in this article is more to provide context, to demonstrate where such changes came from, as well as how and why they were incorporated into Jewish religious practice.

The Central Victorian Goldfields and Acculturation

Following on the heels of the California Gold Rush, Australia's newly formed Victorian colony would experience a gold rush of its own. In the early 1850s, gold was discovered in Victoria's central region. News of this discovery quickly spread across the globe, encouraging thousands to try their luck on these new goldfields. This gold rush drastically altered the colony, ushering in sweeping changes within a relatively short amount of time. Victoria's population more than tripled within the decade of the gold discoveries, leading to significant economic, social, and civil changes. The huge influx of migrants also impacted the colony's religious groups, enabling for small minority faiths and communities to be

bolstered. The Victorian Gold Rushes greatly increased the colony's Jewish population, leading to the creation of new Hebrew congregations. In Ballarat and Sandhurst (which would later change to Bendigo), two of the colony's largest goldfields, Hebrew congregations and communities were created, ones which would endure into the next century.

The Jewish communities and congregations which formed in Bendigo and Ballarat developed incredibly early. By 1855, the Bendigo Jewish community had been gathering together for worship and likeminded company, and would in the following year complete the construction of Bendigo's first synagogue. Located in Dowling street, this weatherboard synagogue would last into the early 1870s, when a new brick synagogue was built on the same location.[6] Bendigo's first Jewish minister, Isaac Friedman, was not employed until 1859. Friedman remained with the Bendigo Hebrew congregation until 1868, when he removed to Melbourne with his family.[7] Gaps of several years between employed synagogue ministers was a common feature of Jewish institutional life in Australia's more remote locations, a result of a colonial setting where religious leaders were hard to find and even harder to keep. Due to these gaps between ministers, Hebrew congregations were often led by their lay members who may have exercised a greater degree of autonomy and flexibility in their application of Jewish law. Lay leadership may have allowed more room for acculturated practices to be incorporated into the synagogue service, providing increased opportunities for Jewish women in Ballarat and Bendigo to contribute towards worship, which other studies show were limited or adopted at a much later date in larger Jewish congregations and communities, such as those in Sydney (Roselya 2007:253). Ballarat's Jewish community had begun to form sometime in 1854 with early meetings occurring in the Clarendon Hotel.[8] By the middle of 1855, Ballarat's wooden synagogue was opened for regular worship with the Rev. David Isaacs as the Jewish minister. Following requests made by the local municipal council for their removal, the Ballarat Hebrew Congregation in 1861 built a brick synagogue a short distance from its original location in Barkley street. Bendigo and Ballarat became significant centres of colonial Jewry, however, they remained relatively small in size when compared to the communities which formed in Melbourne and Sydney. Both synagogues were organised according to Ashkenazi tradition. There were some Jews who were from a Sephardic background, however, too few were on the goldfields for a Sephardic congregation to form or to have any discernible impact. On the goldfields, a more significant number of Jews had migrated from Britain, either being born in England or spending a considerable period of time there before travelling to the colony (Price 1964:13-20). Coming from England, where significant changes were already occurring to the religious lives, practices, and worship of Jews, likely feed into the acculturation process of Jewish communities on the goldfields. A considerable portion were, however, from Central or Eastern Europe. In the material available from the Ballarat marriage register, between 1851 and 1900, more British Jews were married then those who were born in Prussia (Germany) or were from Central Europe.[9] By the 1880s, the register would increasingly document the marriages of Jews who were born in Australia, either in Ballarat, in nearby localities, or from other colonies.[10] It would take until 1870s, however, for Jewish women to become more numerous on the goldfields.

While Jewish congregations had been present on the Central Victorian Goldfields since the mid-1850s, it was not until the 1870s and 1880s that Jewish women comprised a significant portion of these communities. Despite this belated increase of women, Jews on the Central Victorian Goldfields did not reside alone. They were often followed by extensive kin groups, however, on the early goldfields they tended to run along male lines. In the 1850s and 1860s, Jewish men significantly outnumbered Jewish women. Charles Price (1964: Appendix VI) identified 163 Jewish men in Ballarat in 1861, whilst Jewish women numbered only 78. Price (1964: Appendix VI) noted a similar disparity in Bendigo which had 140 men and 68 women in 1861. This was a common feature of the goldfields, where men, whether Jewish or non-Jewish, outnumber women. In 1857, the ration of women to men was 43: 100, however, this would improve in 1861 to 56: 100 (Fahey et al 2006:204). Lorinda Cramer (2015:36) attributed the smaller number of women to the camp environment of the goldfields, which she argued was perceived as lacking the urban comforts of established towns that were preferable for women and children. As an increasing number of single sisters and daughters followed male kin to the goldfields, these familial networks would be further extended and consolidated. By 1881, the number of Jewish men and women had become roughly equal, with the number of Jewish women more than doubling in Ballarat (Price 1946: Appendix VI). For this reason, the article has been limited between 1870 and 1900, as Jewish women were a much more noticeable presence on the goldfields during these years. After 1900, Jewish women, as did the Jewish community more generally, decreased significantly in size in both Bendigo and Ballarat.

During the second half of the nineteenth century, Jews on the Central Victorian Goldfields increasingly acculturated to the predominately Christian society they were situated in. Christian elements of worship made their way into synagogue services, as it did in other colonial synagogues at the time, which were reconceptualised with Jewish meanings. Just as choirs and Christian ministerial dress entered the synagogues, so to were the cultural ideas and values of the Jewish community changing, aligning itself more with British middle-class ideals. As Jews on the goldfields acculturated to colonial society, the ideas and ideals surrounding Jewish women were being reshaped.

Traditional Judaism meets British Evangelicalism

Prevailing British middle-class Evangelical ideals of domesticity and religiosity were increasingly adopted and incorporated into the ethos of Judaic communities, both in Britain and the colonies. In Victorian Britain, discourses on middle-class feminine domesticity centred on marriage, the home, and motherhood (Blunt 1999:46; Davidoff & Hall:25). Ronald Hogeland (1971:101-114) has shown that several different lifestyles were available to middle-class women during the nineteenth century, however, it was the ideas surrounding female domesticity and religiosity which had the most discernible impact on Jewish women on the goldfields and in the colony more generally. The changes to Jewish women's religiosity was not only dependent on the internalisation of British ideals, but was also grounded in the middle-class aspirations of many within the Jewish community. Female domesticity, which included faith aspects, held specific relevance for the middle-classes, and at times religious practice contained a high

degree of social maintenance. The growing ideology of domesticity relegated women to the private realm of the home while men were regarded as being part of the public sphere of paid work and politics (Cordea 2013:116).[11] As Penny Brown (1993: 92) stated,

> with the rise of the middle classes and the Evangelical movement in the late eighteenth century there emerged strong ideologies of domesticity, dependent on a clear division between the public and private spheres, with the home seen as a haven of peace, a source of stability, security, virtue and piety, held together by moral and emotional bonds, a construct modelled on the heavenly home to which all who experienced personal conversion might aspire.

This separation of home and work had recast familial dynamics, giving higher status to the sentimental mother (Richardson 2016:11). According to Patricia Grimshaw (1980:40), the ideologies surrounding domesticity greatly enhanced the value of the home, with the education and care of children becoming a new central and unifying aspect, one which depended on women. Rising domestic ideals allotted women a powerful moral position as home educators who could influence the moral tone of society (Predelli 2000:82). Colonial Australia drew heavily upon this ideology of femininity (McPherson 1994:12). These ideals clearly described what was expected of colonial women. Historians such as Sarah C. Williams (2010:15) have, however, substantially critiqued the use of separate spheres as gendered experiences, arguing that this divide has misrepresented the lived experiences of women and men whose identities were enmeshed in a matrix of circulating discourses which could either challenge or supplement these ideas. As Deborah Rotman (2006:667) argued, gender relations which are defined as private versus public create a dichotomy that distorts historical accounts, disconnecting categories which should be examined as being relational and fluid. This examination will move beyond the binary of the separate spheres to detail the involvement of Jewish women in social and religious activities while examining how British ideas of feminine domesticity and religiosity altered perceptions of Jewish mothers and wives, and how this impacted their worship in synagogues. Whilst British ideals reflected the preferred domicile position of women in traditional Judaism, there were certain elements in which the two diverged considerably. The main disparity to arise was over the increased religiosity afford to Jewish women under British domestic ideas.

British ideas of domestic femininity were different from traditional Judaic views of women, however, the two would merge in the Victorian colony as Jews established and maintained an identity which increasingly drew upon British colonial culture and middle-class values whilst still maintaining strong identifiable links to Judaism. Within historical Judaism, women were also positioned in the home, tasked with the responsibility to care and provide for the family (Goldman 2009:28). Jewish women did not receive the necessary education to participate in public religious worship, nor were they allowed to enter the rabbinate, however, the religious activity of Jewish women in familial and domestic life was and is essential to Jewish practices (Walker 2010:95). Judaism passes along the matrilineal line, ensuring women play an important role in the transfer of a Jewish

identity. Due to her role as caregiver in the home, and the demands which accompanied such a position, Jewish women were exempt from most time-bound commandments or religious laws in Judaism which were expected of men (Goldman 2009:5). While men were required to follow all 613 commandments, only three specifically refer to women: the lighting of candles on the Sabbath, *challah* which is the burning of a small piece of the dough prepared for baking bread, and *niddah* which is the observance of the laws surrounding marital purity and ritual bath immersion.[12] As a result of this lack of obligation, the place of women in communal worship in Judaism, as either participants, contributors, and leaders, has been assessed by scholars as non-existent (Goldman 2009:5). In Eastern Europe, the role of wives extended beyond the home, with many women expected to provide an income. This role was tied to the religious obligations of men within traditional Judaism. It was considered meritorious to spend long hours studying Jewish religious texts, a task in which only men could engage in (Meyers et al 2007). In order for men to devote their time to studying, wives often had to fill any financial gaps their husbands might have left. This usually enabled for wives to hold a substantial amount of authority within the family as a result of their significant economic role and their management of the household (Boyarin 2013:85). In the colonies, the role of economic helpmate continued. Colonial life required a number of women to contribute to the family's income, either helping their husband's businesses or operating their own, a contrast to British ideals. As Bernice McPherson argued, British ideals did not always fit within colonial realities (McPherson 1994:12). The combination of labour shortages and the isolated nature of most settlements required many women and men to adapt these British ideals, as they were obliged to engage in more unconventional work compared to those in England. Lorinda Cramer (2017:214) agreed with McPherson, acknowledging that in the colonies "the ideology of separate spheres – particularly in rural contexts – was unsustainable." As Jews acculturated to the surrounding cultural and social society of their Christian neighbours, British ideas of domesticity and female religion began to appear within the Jewish press.

Beginning in the 1870s, the Victorian colony established its own Jewish print media which ascribed British ideas of domesticity to Jewish women, at times solely allocating women the responsibility of educating their children and instilling a Jewish identity.[13] Jewish women in Victoria were seen as being naturally religious. Similar shifts were occurring in Jewish communities in England, Prussia (Germany), and the United States, where Jewish women were tasked with ensuring children received a religious education and were ascribed as having a heightened, natural religiosity (Galchinsky, 1998:216; Kaplan, 1998:229; Umansky, 1998:342). From 1800, a noticeable shift had occurred in British Evangelicalism, known as the feminisation of Christianity. According to Callum Brown (2009:58), Evangelicalism in nineteenth century Britain had feminised piety, which came to the fore not only in higher participation rates and church attendance, but especially in narrative forms about femininity. Previous to 1800, masculinity had been at the core of representations of piety. Evangelicalism not only "feminised piety" but also "pietised [*sic*] femininity," in which "femininity became sacred *and nothing but sacred*" (emphasis in the original) (Brown 2009:59). This feminisation of Christianity also occurred in the Australian colonies with narratives of pious

femininity emerging in the colonies alongside ideas of domesticity. This feminisation of Christianity influenced colonial Judaism, which also began to include these narratives of female piety and heightened religiosity. In an article published in the Victorian Jewish newspaper *Jewish Herald* on 'Female Education,' the author argued "there is nothing more natural to woman than religion: her tender nature, her susceptible heart, her tractable will, form the most congenial soil for religion."[14] While women had a basic understanding of Judaism's theology, values, and commandments, they were prohibited from partaking in studying certain Judaic texts, theology, and from public worship (Meyer et al 2007). The Jewish woman not only emerged with a heightened religiosity, but was also ascribed a new role: the religious educator and guide. This role of religious educator was connected to the Jewish woman by the author who believed that

> "as a mother, she has to conduct or supervise the early training of her children; and it is then that the root of all that is good and pious is laid. She has to initiate her offspring into the rites and ceremonies of our faith, and to create upon the youthful mind that gentle, pious impression which, as a rule, last for life."[15]

This was a significant diversion away from traditional Jewish beliefs where it was men who bore the most religious obligations, fathers who taught their sons religion, boys who were given a formal religious education, and Jewish men who engaged in public worship as well as private study (Meyer et al 2007). The *Sefer Ḥasidim*, a classic text in Jewish moralistic literature, ascribed to fathers the task of teaching daughters the practical commandments as well as the *halakhic* rules which were considered essential for correct Judaic observance (Meyer et al 2007). The Victorian Jewish community were increasingly anxious about what they felt to be the growing religious laxity of children.[16] Concern over the behaviour and mannerisms of colonial youth occurred across religious denominations in Australia as the stereotype of the 'larrikin' gained currency in the colonies in the late 1860s (Bellanta & Sleight 2014:263). While the word 'larrikin' could refer to poor youths from inner-industrial suburbs, it was also used by middle-class observers as a means to criticise rowdy youngsters. The remedy for colonial Jewish youth, it was perceived, was Jewish women and mothers. The home was often viewed as one means to correct the religious laxity of children.[17] With the roles of men and women divided, the home was viewed as the woman's realm and therefore this work to reform lax children became part of the work to be enacted by mothers. The incorporation of British ideals had turned the Jewish mother from caregiver to a religious familial leader, tasking her with the responsibility of overseeing the family's religion and instilling a deep and long-lasting Judaic faith, a role traditionally held by men or at the least shared by parents. With this new role, however, came criticism.

Riv-Ellen Prell (1999:153) has examined a similar portrayal of Jewish mothers in America, and how communal leaders and scholars blamed the Jewish mother for a loss of identity and religious literacy. In the Victorian colony, Jewish mothers could also be censured for their child-rearing practices, with home influence blamed for a lack of religious adherence.[18] While the Hebrew schools were

acknowledged as one means of imparting a religious education, the home was given superior status as a sight for engendering religious fidelity, with one article claiming that if "the home sets a negative example of what the school teaches, all the efforts of the school will not be able to implant and foster religious feeling in the rising generation."[19] While these articles and letters may not reflect the actual lives of Jewish mothers, their children, or their home practices, they nevertheless impacted their experiences. Jewish mothers who were aware of these expectations and censure may have felt the need to either conform or challenge these ideas. Whilst British ideals began to be reconceptualised by the Victorian Jewish community, challenging traditional ideas of Jewish women, this did not necessarily equate with a lessening of traditional Judaic practices, particularly for women located in areas with smaller Hebrew congregations, such as the Central Victorian Goldfields.

Jewish women on the goldfields continued to keep Judaic laws and customs. While the number of Jewish women who continued to adhere to religious laws is unknowable, evidence does suggest that observances did continue. Nathan Spielvogel (1927: 350-358) in the *Annals of the Ballarat Hebrew Congregation* incorporates oral history given by Mrs Bernstein in 1923. Julia Bernstein, who married Jacob Bernstein in the Ballarat synagogue in 1863, recalled that Jewish women did use the *mikvah* (ritual bath) at the appointed times, suggesting that women were following the religious laws of *niddah*. The bath was rented from William Grimbly whose baths were located in Grenville street. In 1886, Newman Spielvogel donated a *mikvah* to the congregation which was located in the Corporation Baths in Armstrong street, Ballarat. Numerous other studies have found Jewish women in small communities continued to observe religious laws. Paula E. Hyman (2017:22) noted in her own study how Jewish women "seem to have persisted in ritual observance even after their husbands had abandoned these practices." Karla Goldman (2009:34) likewise commented on the religious practices of Jewish women, noting that "where Jews were few or not well organized, individuals did often find ways to observe the laws of kashrut and marital purity on their own." Jewish women on the Central Victorian Goldfields did attempt to continue to observe the religious obligations required of them, indicating the importance placed by women to continue with Judaic practices, even when it might have been difficult to do so. The effects of acculturation to British ideals extended beyond the home and domestic practices.

Jewish Women and the Synagogue

In Bendigo and Ballarat, the role of Jewish women in public worship was changing. Across the Anglo-phone world during the nineteenth century, the role of Jewish women in the synagogue was being transformed. In her study of Jewish women in the American synagogue, Karla Goldman (2009:3) found that the place of women was being redefined as a result of "the inevitable clash between New World conceptions of gender and religiosity and those associated with traditional Judaism." Historically, the role of Jewish women in the synagogue was that of observer. The synagogue was where male religiosity was expressed, and while women could attend services their regular attendance was not a prescribed religious duty nor a centre-piece of their religious identity, as it was for men (Goldman

2009:2-4). As the Bendigo and Ballarat Hebrew Congregations began to adapt Christian elements into synagogue services, space was provided for Jewish women to contribute to public worship. The synagogue had become a means to display female religiosity as well as possibly piety, a British Christian feminine ideal from which some Jewish women were likely drawing upon.

One means of displaying female piety in the synagogue may have been through seating. In the nineteenth century, seating in synagogues were usually segregated by gender, with women and small children sitting on a second-floor balcony, known as the gallery, often with a screen placed so that the men below could not observe them. Reform congregations established in the nineteenth century would abolish this practice. In both Bendigo and Ballarat, gender segregated seating was used; the Ballarat synagogue, which still exists today, continues this traditional practice. While separated from the service, seating in the women's section may have played an important social and religious function for female congregants. Nathan Spielvogel (1927:33) recorded an incident which occurred in 1876 on *Kol Nidrei*, which is a service that occurs prior to sunset on the evening of Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. There was an argument in the gallery concerning rights over seating arrangements, disrupting the service, which stopped momentarily while the matter was settled. As Spielvogel (1927:33) noted, competition over seating in the women's section was fierce, with the front row the most highly prized. A similar phenomenon was commented on Karla Goldman's research noting that "arguments over who could sit in the honored [*sic*] front seats in the now open gallery were quite as impassioned as those over seating down below" (Goldman 2009:75). While Goldman noted its occurrence, she did not offer an explanation. The front row seating may have been so highly prized as it conferred a higher status to those who occupied them. If this was so, then it suggests that the gallery may have been a means through which women displayed class distinctions or social hierarchy. Seating in the gallery and attendance at synagogue may have been a way for women to express their religiosity, possibly one which was connected with British ideas of femininity which increasingly linked church attendance with female piety. Goldman made a similar connection, arguing that "the growth of female synagogue attendance among Americanizing Jews was influenced by prevailing models of American female religious behaviour [sic]"(Goldman 2009:2), which drew from ideas which placed piety as a central component of female domesticity and could be expressed through attendance to religious worship (Goldman 2009:10). While incorporation and contribution to services were limited, and for some women non-existent, the seating arrangement may have been the most public way for women to display this piety with those closest to the service, in the front row, able to better see and hear the worship occurring below, and if no screen was placed, would be better placed to be seen by both the other women and men attending. The front row may have been prized simply because it was the first row, however, it seems unlikely that the view of the section below and the closeness of this seating to the service would not have had any impact. As British feminine ideals gained in popularity among Jewish women on the goldfields, their presence at the synagogue may have been viewed in an alternative light. While not obliged by religious law to attend, Jewish women may have felt their attendance to be necessary, possibly a reason why the gallery was

extended in 1873 so as to accommodate the larger number of Jewish women attending (Spielvogel 1927:30). As Deborah Gorham (2013:8) argued, "women, not men, managed the outward forms that both manifested and determined social status." During the Victorian era, religious belief played a central part in maintaining a middle-class status, with church attendance one means of displaying this religiosity (Gorham 2013:19-20). The Jewish community on the goldfields may have internalised a similar belief, with attendance at synagogue services becoming a means by which Jewish women displayed piety and their family's social status. Attendance, and even sitting in the front row of the gallery, may have therefore influenced the religious identity of Jewish women, as it changed their connection and ideas surrounding the synagogue, and made their attendance at services more central to both their own and their family's social class and religiosity, whereas historically it had been inessential. While Jewish women were relegated to the gallery above, there were increased opportunities for women to contribute towards public worship below.

The introduction of choirs and musical instruments enabled for women to be incorporated into synagogue services. Judaic tradition viewed women's voices as having the potential to distract men from worship, and should therefore not be heard during services (Goldman 2009:84). While there have been various interpretations on women's voices in the synagogue, women were prohibited from chanting or singing during public services. While the Chief Rabbi of the British Empire formally sanctioned the use of mixed choirs in the synagogue in 1892,(Roselya 2007:143), the Hebrew congregations in Bendigo and Ballarat had incorporated the musical talent and voices of Jewish women into their services much earlier. When the Ballarat Hebrew Congregation celebrated the opening of their new synagogue in 1881, music was added to the service. The music produced for the occasion was provided by Bertha Hollander, who played at the harmonium.[20] Nathan Spielvogel (1927:42) noted a similar occurrence during public worship again in 1881. During the service, Ade Willets sung "a sacred solo from the gallery," much to the displeasure of the more orthodox members of the community (Spielvogel 1927:42). When the Ballarat synagogue celebrated the sixtieth anniversary of Queen Victoria's reign in 1897, a choir of Jewish women and men were organised for the occasion.[21] When the congregations on the Central Victorian Goldfields introduced women's voices and organ music, the intention was not to challenge traditional Judaic gender roles, but likely stemmed from the desire to introduce decorum and to reform services. While the participation of women in public worship did not stem from opposition to ideology, it did arise over the incorporation and adaption of Christian elements of worship. It also inadvertently challenged the traditional place of women in the synagogue. Women acting as singers or musicians in synagogue worship directly contributed to the service, turning women from silent observers to vocal contributors. Choirs and music may have offered Jewish women an important symbolic engagement with the service, lessening the control of male adherents and transforming the service from a solely male display of public worship to include women.

As women became contributors to public worship, they may have become empowered to challenge the authority of men concerning the synagogue. Jewish female congregational members in Ballarat did attempt to gain some influence and

hoped to be able to vote on congregational matters, but their attempt was blocked by the male members who felt it unsuitable for women to do so (Rosenthal 1979:56-57; Rubinstein 1991:10). While women could participate in services, they continued to be excluded from the congregation's committee board. The Ballarat Jewish minister, Rev. Israel Goldreich, made this clear in 1894 when "he contended that the Divine law gave women employment sufficient to continually engage them in their homes and in charitable work without their appearing in the domain of politics."[22] The incorporation of women's voices and activity into the synagogue service likely changed the place of Jewish women in religious services. This incorporation may have empowered the women in Ballarat to challenge the male authority of the synagogue, demonstrating how powerful their integration into the service could be on women's own sense of space and religiosity. Jewish women were able to contribute to the synagogue and to services in another indirect way.

Jewish women on the goldfields were increasingly provided opportunities to decorate the synagogue space. This decoration was likely related to the incorporation of British ideals on femininity by the Jewish community, to their acculturation and incorporation of British cultural ideas. As part of their prescribed domestic role, colonial women from the middle and upper classes were responsible for creating and maintaining the home, which included decoration (Shiell 2012:24). Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall (1987:362) discussed the link created between women and decorating in *Family Fortunes*, noting that "the capacity to create and beautify [the] home was becoming an expectation of natural feminine identity." As the Jewish communities on the Central Victorian Goldfields, indeed in the colony more generally, acculturated to integrate British cultural and social ideals into their individual and communal ethos, it is also likely that such views of the home, decoration, and femininity were also adapted. If this was so, then it certainly explains why this task increasingly fell to Jewish women on the goldfields. Jewish women were likely able to decorate the synagogue space, including the section below the gallery, as it may have been viewed as a natural extension of their domestic practices. This decoration of the synagogue space was observed in other colonial congregations of a similar period, as Lancia Quay Roselya (2007:253) demonstrated that Sydney Jewish women could decorate the synagogue space for special services, however, she noted that this was rare. Roselya (2007:253) observed that this practice of women decorating the synagogue "was considered exceptional," and that it was not until the mid-1890s that it became more common. On the Central Victorian Goldfields, this was not so, possibly a result of the liberal nature of the early goldfields which allowed for social dissent (Reeves & Nichols 2007:3-4) and more permeable cross-cultural encounters (Bagnall 2016:58). In Ballarat, when the Rev. Goldreich officiated for the first time in 1868, the synagogue was "beautifully decorated for the occasion by the wives and daughters of members."[23] For Shavuot in 1882, "the interior of the building present[ed] a beautiful aspect with wreaths and festoons of leaves and flowers, which ha[d] been tastefully hung by several young ladies."[24] In Bendigo in 1880, a *sukkah* was constructed for the first time next to the synagogue and was "tastefully decorated by the ladies."[25] A *sukkah* is a temporary hut constructed for Sukkot, a week long harvest celebration commemorating God's protection of the Jewish people when they left Egypt (Kutch et al 2007). The *sukkah* "proved a

source of delight to the children, many of whom have never before seen a Succoh [sic]."[26] Jewish women in Ballarat and Bendigo often decorated the synagogue space for special services.[27] When Jewish women decorated the synagogue, they were also interacting and temporarily transforming this space, one which may have been allowed under the incorporation and adaption of British ideals of femininity. Thus, women were able to reconstitute their role within the synagogue, physically engaging with the space and contributing to visual enhancement. With women relegated to the gallery, they had been denied opportunities to participate, however, they were increasingly engaging with a space in which religious activity occurred, and may have resulted in women obtaining a new means to express their religiosity. The *sukkah* also further demonstrates the changing role of Jewish women and mothers as religious educators, who directly contributed to the religious knowledge children gained at the synagogue by helping to set up and arrange the *sukkah*.

The increased influence of Jewish women in the synagogue, where they sang, established a seating order, and decorated the space, likely recast the relationship between women and the synagogue. In examining Jewish women and the America synagogue, Karla Goldman found that these introductions and changes, while stemming from a desire for decorum, offered women an important symbolic role and empowered women by bringing their position closer to that of men's in the synagogue (2009:88). She argued that this shift redefined the status of Jewish female congregants (Goldman 2009:88). Similar changes were occurring in synagogues in Bendigo and Ballarat, and it is therefore equally likely that such changes were also occurring to how Jewish women viewed their worship practices and expressions of religiosity. Those who contributed to the synagogue space may have felt more invested in the synagogue and the services as they were also now the fruits of their own labour, not just that of their male kin and kith. Singing in and decorating the synagogue may have strengthen the religious identity of Jewish women as the space held an added significance, becoming a means of representing their religiosity as well as displaying, to both themselves and the congregation, the valuable contribution which women could make towards services and the synagogue. The lack of personal primary material means that we cannot know or understand completely this change, how it affected Jewish women's ideas of ritual, worship, and religious practice, or even whether such personal changes occurred at all, although this seems unlikely. Changes to synagogue worship and women's increasing role within them acted as symbolic symbols which were not just evident to others, but also for themselves. Jewish women were no longer a passive audience to public worship, but were transformed into active participants who were able to create, define, and alter the synagogue space and religious services.

Conclusion

As the Jewish communities on the Central Victorian Goldfields acculturated to the surrounding British colonial society, the role and ideas concerning Jewish women had been recast. Traditional Judaism had merged with British Evangelical ideas of feminine domesticity to create a new ideal for Jewish women, one which

enabled for Jewish women to connect with British society while still maintaining strong identifiable links with Judaism. These new ideals portrayed the Jewish woman as a pious domestic angel and familial religious teacher, naturally suited to all domestic pursuits and with a heightened faith, further enhancing the place of Jewish women in the home in historical Judaism. The incorporation of British Evangelical ideas also created new forms of religious expression. As synagogue worship altered to include Christian practices, new means were created for women to demonstrate their religiosity, as well as their social class, and to be included into public worship. Historically excluded from services, Jewish women on the goldfields were able to participate and demonstrate their religiosity through synagogue seating, singing, and decorating. As their place in the synagogue altered, women's relationship with this space and their ideas on public worship likely changed also. The religious identity of Jewish women on the Central Victorian Goldfields was reshaped as the community acculturated, an altering which affected the lives, faith, and worship of women. Faith and religiosity had become a central aspect of Jewish women's identity on the Central Victorian Goldfields. With this heightened religiosity, Jewish women, the mothers of Israel, could raise devout children and lead lax husbands back to the old paths of religion.

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Endnotes

[1] This project is funded by the Australian Research Council through a linkage grant, LP160100099 *Faith on the Goldfield*.

[2] After a period of nearly a hundred years, another Jewish congregation would form in Bendigo in the 2010s. Kehillat S'dot Zahav, the Congregation of the Fields of Gold, is an interfaith congregation/community group which welcomes persons from different religious faiths, engaging in interreligious exchange, prayer, and worship. No synagogue has been built in Bendigo.

[3] "Synagogal Music," *Jewish Herald*, December 30, 1879: 10.
[4] "Advanced Judaism," *Jewish Herald*, April 5, 1895: 10; "Reform in our Ritual," *Jewish Herald*, May 21, 1880: 4.
[5] "The Ritual," *Jewish Herald*, May 12, 1880: 3.
[6] "Opening of the New Jewish Synagogue," *Bendigo Advertiser*, September 30, 1872: 2.
[7] "Advertising," *Bendigo Advertiser*, June 23, 1868: 3; "Family Notices," *Bendigo Advertiser,* July 11, 1871: 2.
[8] "Hebrew Synagogue," *Star*, January 26, 1861: 4.
[9] Australian Jewish Historical Society Sydney Archive, AB 175, Marriage register for Ballarat Synagogue.
[10] Australian Jewish Historical Society Sydney Archive, AB 175, Marriage register for Ballarat Synagogue.

[11] For the early history of the use and debate in scholarship on the separate spheres, see Linda K. Kerber, 'Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History,' *The Journal of American History*, 75/ 1 (1988), 9-39.

[12] *Challah* refers to a special bread in Jewish cuisine which is usually braided and eaten on ceremonial occasions such as the Sabbath and on major Jewish holidays. *Niddah* refers to the Jewish laws surrounding purification and married women. According to Judaic law, men are forbidden to engage in sexual relations with their wife during (and for some periods before and after) her menstruation. Seven days after the birth of a son, women were required to immerse themselves, while the birth of a daughter required fourteen days. Intimacy may only continue after her menstruation has ended and she has undergone a ritual immersion in a *mikvah*, a ritual bath. *Niddah* is one of the three ritual obligations specifically aimed at women. The Laws relating to *niddah* are considered one of the most fundamental principles of religious law. Israel Moses Ta- Shma and Judith R. Baskin.
[13] In 1871, the Victorian Jewish newspaper, *Australia Israelite*, was created, however, its publications was short lived and was discontinued in 1875. The *Jewish Herald*, which was printed in Melbourne, was established in 1879 and would continue to publish periodicals into the next century.
[14] "Female Education," *Jewish Herald*, January 9, 1880: 6.
[15] "Female Education," *Jewish Herald*, January 9, 1880: 6.
[16] "Introduction," *Jewish Herald*, December 12, 1879: 6.
[17] "Introduction," *Jewish Herald*, December 12, 1879: 6; "Correspondence," *Jewish Herald*, February 22, 1884: 4; "Our Hebrew Schools and Our Religious State," *Jewish Herald*, September 9, 1881: 9; "A Lady's Views," *Jewish Herald*, November 9, 1888: 14.
[18] "A Lady's View," *Jewish Herald*, November 9, 1888: 6; "Odds and Ends," *Jewish Herald,* March 2, 1888:12.
[19] "Our Hebrew Schools and Our Religious State," *Jewish Herald,* September 9, 1881: 9.
[20] "Consecration of the Ballarat Synagogue," *Jewish Herald*, September 23, 1881: 6.
[21] "Ballarat," *Jewish Herald*, June 25, 1897: 4.
[22] "No Title," *Ballarat Star*, June 11, 1894: 2.
[23] "News and Notes," *Ballarat Star*, June 15, 1868: 2.
[24] "News and Notes," *Ballarat Star*, May 24, 1882: 2. Shevuoth, or Shavuot in correct spelling, is also known as 'Feast of Weeks.' This holiday celebrates the giving of the Torah by God to the Jewish people on Mount Sinai. The holiday includes lighting special candles, all night learning of the Torah, a synagogue service, and a special meal. The second holiday Aaron mentions, Hoshannah Rabbah (correctly spelt Hoshana Rabba), is considered the final day of God's 'judgement,' and the last chance for adherents to gain atonement. This holiday includes night learning, morning prayers, a festive meal, and a special service in the synagogue which involves all gatherers striking the ground with willow branches.
[25] "The Synagogues," *Jewish Herald*, September 24, 1880: 2.
[26] "The Synagogues," *Jewish Herald*, September 24, 1880: 2.

[27] "Sandhurst," *Jewish Herald*, November 21, 1889: 7; "Sandhurst," *Jewish Herald*, October 31, 1884: 6.

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