Offer, Elizabeth. "A Good Sound Schooling: Hebrew Schools and Jewish Education on the Central Victorian Goldfields, 1851-1901", Australian Journal of Jewish Studies XXXV (2022): 5-29

A Good Sound Schooling: Hebrew Schools and Jewish Education on the Central Victorian Goldfields, 1851-1901

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Abstract

This article examines the educational experiences of Jewish children and the formation of Hebrew schools on the Central Victorian Goldfields between 1851 and 1901. Living in small communities distantly located from colonial centres, Jewish parents were required to carefully consider the available schooling options for their children, making active decisions based on social, economic, familial, and religious needs. Such decisions often required a consideration of aspects beyond their control. On the goldfields, developing colonial law, rising middle-class ideas, and an expansion in Western education significantly shaped the religious educational experiences of Jewish children, which was uneven and defined by gender. Regardless, Hebrew schools emerged as important spaces of religious learning and communal membership for Jewish children, as places where religious tradition was negotiated with British middle-class values. This article provides the first in-depth look into Jewish education on the Central Victorian Goldfields in the mid- to late nineteenth century, contributing towards significant research gaps concerning children, Hebrew schools, and colonial Victoria.

Introduction

For Jewish children on the Central Victorian Goldfields, faith and learning were a significant part of their colonial childhoods, guiding perceptions of the world they lived in and the people who inhabited them.[1] A letter to the editor published in the *Jewish Herald* in 1881 provided a rare glimpse into the religious life of a young colonial writer, Aaron Bernstein, who was thirteen years old and lived in Ballarat. Bernstein discussed a community custom which he termed 'Learning'. Bernstein was referring to the practice in Judaism for adherents to stay awake during the night on specific holidays to either read or study religious texts.[2] As Bernstein noted, in Ballarat 'there are houses where the ancient and beautiful custom of "Learning" is kept up with all the pleasant accompaniments of coffee, cake, fruit, & c., and where lads … are encouraged to take part, and which they do'('Learning' 17 Jun. 1881). It was, however, a tradition kept by only a few households, as Bernstein noted, 'I hope you will pardon my filial pride, when I add that the house of my honoured and dear parents is one, and for many years was the only place, where the "Learning" was kept up, and I hope you will think my vanity

equally pardonable, when I tell you that the second place is at the house of my dear and respected uncle, Mr. N. F. Spielvogel.'

Bernstein demonstrated a sense of familial pride in how religious rituals and 'Learning' were upheld in his home and that of his relatives, demonstrating the importance of such aspects to how children understood their family, religion, and community. Yet for Bernstein and many other Jewish children, religious learning also occurred outside the home setting. In the 1860s, Hebrew schools were established in Bendigo and Ballarat, extending the available schooling options for Jewish parents. Hebrew schools affected the lived experiences of Jewish children and how they understood themselves and others, however, these institutions were also shaped by wider historical reforms.

Throughout the Modern period, the education and schooling received by Jewish children in Britain and Europe underwent pronounced changes. These transformations were a direct response to developing ideas of childhood innocence in the West and religious reform in Judaism. In Britain, Europe, and America, ideals surrounding Jewish children were redefined in response to developing conceptions of childhood and class (Klapper 2001; Sartori 2004; Kogman 2016). These ideological alterations were further reinforced by and contributed towards complicated and uneven shifts in the lived experiences of Jewish children as their childhoods were layered with different gendered, cultural, and social ideas (Hemming and Madge 2011, 41). Education has always been highly valued within Judaism. However, the type of schooling received and the esteem attributed to these institutions were recast through the nineteenth century (Brickman 2007). A rising number of historical studies have uncovered the evolving education of Jewish children in Britain, Europe, and America, yet no research has been conducted into the colonial experience, particularly on the Central Victorian Goldfields, a gap this article will cover.

As this article argues, Hebrew schools and the educational experiences of Jewish children on the Central Victorian Goldfields were redefined by colonial law, Victorian middle-class ideas, and an expansion in Western education, a transformation that was uneven and defined by gender. The separation of religious and secular schooling following the Education Act of 1872 recast the role and place of Hebrew schools, which became increasingly difficult to maintain. The educational experiences of Jewish children were in many ways similar to those of non-Jewish children, though the Jewish community also faced unique challenges. The minority status of the community as well as its small size influenced their decisions and responses to educational shifts in the colony, impacting the Hebrew schools and Jewish children in ways that it did not for other segments of society. Jewish girls in particular benefited from the expansion in schooling and gendered ideals as Hebrew schools began to accept female students. Hebrew schools emerged as important spaces of religious learning and communal membership for Jewish

children, as places where religious tradition was negotiated with British middle-class ideals. To understand such changes, however, first requires a discussion of the shifting ideologies surrounding children and education in the nineteenth century.

Background: Shifting ideologies and overseas experiences

On the Central Victorian Goldfields, Jews based their behaviour on British middle-class ideals and Jewish conceptions of childhood, which impacted the education and activities available to Jewish children. This mediation, complex as it was, connected to a much longer and multifaceted history. Like other age-related terms, definitions of childhood are bound by geographical and historical context, with interpretations also incorporating beliefs regarding gender, religiosity, and familial responsibility (Sleight and Robinson 2016, 7). Prevalent European- and Christian-influenced ideologies of childhood developed throughout the Modern period, yet Judaism also retained specific sentiments and attitudes. In the colonies, as it was elsewhere, these divergent understandings of childhood often merged, an aspect infrequently discussed by Australian scholars.

Histories on colonial Jewish communities overwhelmingly focus on adults, assigning often negligible attention to the experiences of Jewish children and the Hebrew schools they attended. The few histories that have been produced on Jewish education in Australia, limited as they are, have yet to incorporate the Central Victorian Goldfields, leaving unexamined a significant segment of the Victorian Jewish community (Solomon 1970, 8-20; 1972). Some of the most well-known histories on Australian Jews do provide a glimpse into Jewish education on the goldfields before 1900, such as Suzanne Rutland's *The Jews in Australia* and Hilary Rubinstein's book of the same name (Rutland 2005; Rubinstein 1991). Such neglect is surprising given the rising popularity of such studies overseas.

In Britain, historiography of Jewish education and childhood experiences is a much larger field of study, and often reveals the importance of schools and extracurricular activities in presenting Anglicised forms of Judaism to children (Tananbaum 2015; Greenberg 1985; Singer 1986, 163-178).[3] A historian of Jewish Manchester, Ros Livshin demonstrated how Jewish immigrant children developed a dedication to Anglicised forms of Judaism through schooling, learning English customs, language, manners, and discipline in the classroom and the school yard (Livshin 1990, 79-96). Historian Gerry Black uncovered a similar phenomenon in his examination of the Jews' Free School, Britain's largest Jewish school in the nineteenth century (Black 1998). As Black indicated, the school held charitable and Anglicising aims, which not only contributed towards instilling Anglo forms of Judaism in children but were also vital in providing food and clothing to poor students. Over in America, histories of Jewish education have likewise received significant attention (Sarna 1998, 8-21; Avni 2014, 256-286;

Krasner 2011). Both the European and American Jewish literature has in the last twenty years shown a particular interest in the education of Jewish girls, which was transformed in the nineteenth century to allow young girls to access formal religious instruction (Klapper 2005; Sartori 2004; Adler 2011; Abrams 2006). Drawing upon this international literature, this article will provide the first in-depth study into the Hebrew schools and Jewish education on the Central Victorian Goldfields. In doing so, this article reveals how Hebrew schools drew upon Jewish and British middle-class ideas to influence children's understandings of community, gender, and identity. The reluctance of Australian historians to engage with Jewish children may in part result from the difficulty in understanding how contemporary Jewish and non-Jewish ideas of childhood interacted.

Whilst conceptions varied by location and time period, Orthodox Jewish theology significantly defined childhood ideals regarding Jewish youths, connecting stages of life and religious maturity to ritual.[4] Central Jewish texts such as the Midrash and the Mishnah outline certain expectations for children, the most significant being the ideals to honour their parents and teachers, study, and attend worship. Over time, this expectation to honour one's parents expanded to include grandparents and in-laws (Browning, Bunge, and Bluebond-Langner 2009, 18). As minors, Jewish children do not have religious responsibilities and are thus treated differently from adults within Jewish practice and law, though children were expected to learn the necessary religious duties that would be expected of them as adults. Great emphasis was also placed on religious education and training (Sivan 2018, 8). The identity of Jewish children intersected with a range of cultural, kinship, and gendered beliefs that defined the belonging and place of youths within the community through descent systems, such as matrilineal descent (Hemming and Madge 2011, 41). In Judaism, important life cycle ceremonies surround Jewish youth to ensure their place in the community as well as their transition into adulthood. Ceremonies such as a *brit milah* for boys, a circumcision ritual, and a *zeved habit* for girls, the naming of newborn girls in the synagogue, acts to welcome infants into the Jewish community and faith. Later, rituals are performed that mark the beginning of adulthood for boys, known as a *bar mitzvah*, which occurs when they are 13 years old. At this age, boys gain the same religious obligations of adult Jewish men, meaning they can be counted as part of a *minyan* and are considered responsible for their religious duties. For Jewish girls, the beginning of adulthood occurs at age 12. Across history, these ideas and ideals on Jewish childhood were increasingly influenced by the surrounding non-Jewish milieu.

From antiquity to modern times, Jews have most often lived in proximity to or under the rule of other religions and nations, which has shaped communal, social, and religious values, including those relating to children. This spatial closeness has led to shifts in ideas of Jewish childhood as Jews have acculturated to their neighbours, leading to the reinterpretation of

traditions in light of these non-Jewish values (Browning, Bunge, and Bluebond-Langner 2009, 16). Such changes were particularly pronounced from the Early Modern Period as the *Haskalah*, a Jewish intellectual movement prominent amongst Central and Eastern European communities, challenged traditional frameworks and religious practice (Browning, Bunge, and Bluebond-Langner 2009, 16). In colonial Australia, Judaism clearly defined the understandings of Jews concerning childhood and education as they continued to draw upon their faith to perform and interpret the life stages of their children. Whilst relying on Jewish conceptions, colonial Jews also increasingly engaged with middle-class ideals on childhood, an ideology itself undergoing change.

From the eighteenth century, ideologies surrounding children were altered across Europe as government intervention and philosophical thought interacted with the realities of familial life (Ariès 1962; Brown 1993; Stearns 2017). Beginning with the French Revolution, governments progressively gained prerogative over children in an attempt to improve public health, encourage a suitable supply of workers and troops, assure political loyalty, and to protect children from certain forms of abuse (Stearns 2017, 75). While this state intervention mainly occurred in the form of government-run schooling, it also developed as child labour laws, sponsored parental guidance, public health measures, and the willingness to remove children from guardians (Stearns 2017, 75). These legal and governance changes were supported by cultural shifts that assigned children an individualistic value, which resulted from developing conceptions of childhood innocence (Stearns 2017, 72). During the Enlightenment, a growing belief emerged among Western philosophers that children were born uncorrupted. The English philosopher John Locke, one of the most well-known proponents of this view, proposed that children were malleable blank states that were essentially good, or at least neutral, unless tainted by outside forces (Stearns 2017, 77). Another significant supporter of this view was Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who opposed the Christian tradition of original sin and viewed children as being not fully developed until they reached their early teens (Heywood 2001, 32). In the Victorian period, children were positioned as helpless beings in need of guidance and protection so that they may become responsible adults. This idea held wide appeal as middle-class observers, social reformers, writers, and governments alike favoured this view of childhood innocence and vulnerability (Stearns 2017, 80; Quirk 2009, 39). This shift towards childhood innocence also complicated understandings regarding children and maturity as different ages for the attainment of adulthood emerged.

With such changes underway, the ages relied upon to define childhood and maturity could vary. Contemporary social commentary lacked any psycho-sexual conceptualisation of adolescence with age boundaries remaining irregular across the nineteenth century, leading to the emergence of different ages for maturity (Sleight and Robinson 2016, 7). During the

Victoria era, 21 was generally viewed as the age by which children reached adulthood (Prangnell and Quirk 2009, 40). Similar conceptions of childhood, age, and maturity were exported to the Australian colonies where they quickly displaced Indigenous beliefs of adult attainment through knowledge transfer and specific rites (Kociumbas 1997, 4). For white colonialists, fears emerged concerning the attitudes and health of their children as well as the possible effects on reaching adult majority in the colonial climate, which differed substantially from settler views held over the maturity of Indigenous youths. This article adopts the upper age limit of 21 as it incorporates both Jewish and British conceptions of age and maturity. The focus is mainly on persons aged between five and 16 as this reflects the available primary material. Newspapers, which were the main type of source used, focused primarily upon the public institutions that children attended or engaged with instead of individual voices and experiences as few Jewish children left written records. Despite this lack of primary material, the sources that are available reveal how colonial frameworks and middle-class ideals impacted Hebrew schools and the type of education received by Jewish children. Hebrew schools were not, however, always an available option for Jewish parents. In the early decades of the Gold Rush, Jewish parents were required to consider other, more accessible schooling choices for their children.

'Comfort and careful tendings': Early educational experiences on the goldfields

In the 1850s and early 1860s, there were no formal Hebrew schools on the Central Victorian Goldfields as initial focus for these newly developed Jewish communities centred on forming congregations and building synagogues. Gold was discovered in New South Wales and Victoria in 1851.[5] The news of the gold findings quickly spread, leading to a huge rush to the colonies. In the Victorian colony, almost 100,000 migrants arrived between 1851 and 1852, quickly placing Melbourne as Australia's largest city (Goodman 2013, 181). Once on the goldfields, Jews quickly established congregations and synagogues, with Bendigo opening its first synagogue in 1856. For a considerable number of years after the synagogue's opening ceremony, Bendigo remained without a paid minister.[6] Isaac Friedman, the first paid minister of the Bendigo Hebrew congregation, did not arrive in Bendigo until 1859. Once in Bendigo as the Hebrew minister, he acted as *chazzan* and *shochet*, advising the congregation on matters of worship. Isaac Friedman remained with the Bendigo Hebrew congregation until 1868, when he moved back to Melbourne with his family ('Advertising' 23 Jun. 1868).[7] Over in Ballarat, the local Hebrew congregation built their first wooden synagogue in 1855 with the Rev. David Isaacs acting as the Jewish minister.[8] Following the demands of the local municipal council for removal, the Ballarat Hebrew congregation built a brick synagogue in 1861, just a short distance from its original location in Barkly Street. The delay in forming Hebrew schools

required Jewish parents to consider alternative schooling options. A range of possibilities were open to Jewish parents, both locally and in more distantly located areas. Most tended to prefer local Christian schooling choices. Some Jewish children, however, had undertaken schooling in Britain and Europe before arriving in the colony.

Depending on their place of birth and age at migration, some Jewish children on the Central Victorian Goldfields likely undertook schooling in Britain or Europe, which had recently expanded to incorporate secular instruction. Before the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, Jewish children generally did not receive a secular education, as Orthodox Jewish communities placed no communal or *Halachic* (Jewish religious law) value on secular instruction (Abosch 2004, 173). Jews tended to view secular education as drawing individuals away from Judaism and Jewish communities, portraying this form of education as potentially harmful (Abosch 2004, 173). As Jewish communities responded to emancipation and the urban experience, the education of Jewish children was secularised, moving away from a purely religious curriculum to include secular subjects or trades (Silberberg 2015, 52). In European centres such as Germany, educational systems tended to be managed by religious groups with Jewish children either attending the Reform or Orthodox schools that catered for the entire Jewish community, a contrast to the education systems available to Jews in Britain (Silberberg 2015, 52; Singer 1986, 173). In England, middle-class families tended to either send their children to non-Jewish schools, hired tutors, or enrolled them in the newly-established private Hebrew boarding schools (Silberberg 2015, 53). For poorer Jewish families in England, a small number of charity schools were established in large towns and centres to provide education, both religious and secular, to those who could not afford schooling (Singer 1986, 167). The Jewish children who attended the charity schools in London often graduated with only a limited knowledge of religious and secular subjects, yet such schools were also problematic for middle-class Jews (Singer 1986, 165). Jewish middle-class observers were critical of these schools, which they perceived as promoting Jewish distinctiveness and therefore jeopardised the community's integration and emancipation (Silberberg 2015, 53). While a Jewish Free School was never established on the Central Victorian Goldfields, Jewish parents in Bendigo and Ballarat faced similar schooling options to those in England.

On the early goldfields, Jewish parents could employ tutors or send their children to distant Jewish boarding schools to ensure they received a formal religious education, though such options were restricted. Tutors were one readily available and close option, however, not all provided adequate religious and Hebrew instruction. In 1859, Mr Solomon, 'at the request of several friends', opened a small school located on Specimen Hill, Ballarat, where he instructed 'young gentlemen' in Hebrew ("Advertising" 6 Jul. 1859). It seems this was the same Solomon who was in Collingwood in 1858

and offered Hebrew lessons for students preparing for the Church, therefore his lessons were likely restricted to older students and to Hebrew language learning ("Advertising" 18 Mar. 1858). Jewish parents also hired governesses to provide religious instruction to their children, women such as Louisa Fredman who prepared a son of the Silberberg family for his *bar mitzvah*, a Jewish coming of age ceremony (Silberberg 2015, 206). The ability of Jewish women to know and to teach Jewish religion was a recent phenomenon born from the expansion in Jewish women's religious education, which will be discussed more in a later section. Another option was to send children to Hebrew schools in Melbourne.

Advertisements by the Melbourne Hebrew congregation were posted in the Ballarat and Bendigo newspapers, notifying Jewish parents on the goldfields that the Melbourne congregation was prepared to accept a limited number of male pupils for their Hebrew school. The article noted that the Melbourne Hebrew school would provide a 'good sound' schooling as well as the 'comforts and careful tendings [sic] of a home', indicating that children from the goldfields were expected to board at the school or nearby ("Advertising" 18 Mar. 1858). This option to send children to Melbourne could prove problematic as Jewish parents likely considered the benefits and the pitfalls of such a move. Boarding children at the Melbourne Hebrew school was restricted to male pupils, meaning that daughters were unable to access this religious education. For goldfields Jewish parents with limited resources, the additional costs of boarding their sons in Melbourne likely also impeded access. Alongside such considerations, Jewish parents must have also contemplated the emotional and social consequences of sending their sons to Melbourne, and therefore may have been unwilling to endure the separation such a move would entail. While Jewish children could be sent to Melbourne for schooling, most Jewish parents seem to have turned to local non-Jewish schooling options for their children, as evidence from Bendigo suggested.

In the early gold rush decades, a significant number of Jewish children in Bendigo were attending local non-Jewish schools, with religious instruction likely occurring outside school hours. During the 1850s, Jewish children in Bendigo were largely attending the local Presbyterian school ("Original Correspondence" 26 May 1857). A newspaper article from 1857 noted that Bendigo had 17 schools: nine belonged to the Church of England, one to the Presbyterian Church, two for the Roman Catholics, and one to the Wesleyans; a few schools were also established in the most densely-populated gullies but their religious persuasion was unknown ("Original Correspondence" 26 May 1857). The daily average of attendance at these schools was about 136 students. However, the Presbyterian school was stated to have 185 students on the roll, a result that was attributed to the large attendance of Jewish children ("Original Correspondence" 26 May 1857). With no Hebrew school of their own, Jewish parents ascribed more importance to the secular

education provided by the school rather than the religious teachings. This follows from the long tradition within Judaism which values education and intellectual attainment (Solomon 1970, 10). This preference for the Presbyterian school continued into the 1860s.

The Sandhurst (Bendigo) Common School examination register for the Presbyterian Church for the years 1864 to 1868 recorded a number of Jewish children, including Louis and Priscilla Lazarus, the children of local Jewish mining magnate Barnett Lazarus (Sandhurst (Bendigo) Common school Examination Register Index 1864-68). As Barnett Lazarus demonstrated, children were kept close to parents even when funds were available for schooling in Melbourne; Lazarus had by the 1860s amassed a considerable fortune and could well afford to send his children to Melbourne to receive schooling. The high number of Jewish children at the Presbyterian school indicated that Jewish parents were turning to local non-Jewish means to educate their children, working within the available options to make decisions regarding what they felt was best for their families. Jewish children likely received some, if not most, of their Jewish and Hebrew learning at this time either in the home or in the synagogue. Yet Jewish ministers, who were required to fill a range of communal roles and were not always employed consistently, would have impacted the religious education received at the synagogue. Soon, however, Jewish children began to attend the newly opened Hebrew schools, receiving more formal religious instruction in a space that fostered stronger communal and social ties.

'His own children got on better at state schools': The challenges of the Hebrew schools

Over the next two decades, Bendigo and Ballarat each opened a Hebrew school, providing a place of Jewish learning and communal connection for children yet such institutions were also beset with issues. Early in 1865, a small notice appeared in the Ballarat Star informing the public of the 'Hebrew boy's school, recently erected on the Synagogue reserve, Barkly Street', with Mr White acting as teacher ("News and Notes" 25 Apr. 1865). Whilst the notice suggested that the school was originally for male pupils only, the school soon expanded to accept female students. The opening date of a similar institution in Bendigo could not be identified, as no mention was made in the local papers until 1880, with the article suggesting that the school had been open for some time ("The Bendigo Advertiser" 23 Sep. 1880).[9] The Hebrew school in Bendigo was likely well-known amongst the Jewish community, and therefore did not require advertisement. Regardless, Hebrew schools were important places of religious learning and communal connection for Jewish children, where tradition and modernity were navigated in conjunction with middle-class values, economic necessity, and the difficulties of a diminishing Jewish community. Faced with such challenges and waning parental interest, Jewish communities struggled to maintain the Hebrew

schools. These issues were further exasperated by pervasive Protestant frameworks in the colony, which at times forced Jewish parents to choose between a religious or secular education. Hebrew schools were originally designed as day schools that incorporated religious and secular subjects into the curriculum with an English Master teaching the children. This structure was revised with the introduction of the Education Act of 1872 in Victoria, which mandated school attendance through the provision of 'free, secular, and compulsory' schooling (Peel and Twomey 2011, 84).[10]

Previously, denominational schools were maintained through governmental grants and without any public controls, both of which ended with the Education Act (Grundy 1981, 121). The Education Act replaced the variety of quasi-private, private, religious, and government schools with state operated schools, though a large number of Catholic schools remained as many within the Catholic community worried over the Protestant influence of these State schools (Larson 1986, 29, 58). For most nineteenth-century colonialists, the concept of secularity did not mean being without religion (Chavura, Gascoigne, and Tregenza 2019, 102). Contemporary conceptions of education generally included moral instruction, with faith believed to be the foundation of morality (Chavura, Gascoigne, and Tregenza 2019, 102). Most colonial elites believed that Protestant Christianity was the realisation of enlightened religion, and therefore provided the rational basis for education (Chavura, Gascoigne, and Tregenza 2019, 102). The Education Act of 1872 promoted mixed responses from religious communities and clergy. While a divisive issue for some Presbyterians, most Presbyterians supported State schooling (Theobald 1989, 245-246).[11] More intense opposition to the Education Act was demonstrated by the Catholic clergy, who viewed the secular education movement as containing a dual character, as being both Protestant and anti-religious, aspects which were abhorrent to the Catholic conscience (O'Farrell 1985, 168-169). The Education Act decisively demonstrated how Protestant the colony was at both the popular and elite levels as Catholics were essentially forced to support their own schools while at the same time pay through their taxes for the general education system established by the State (Chavura, Gascoigne, and Tregenza 2019, 101). The attitude of the Jewish community was harder to place in this conflicting religious and social dialogue regarding schooling in Victoria, partly as a result of their desire to disconnect themselves from contentious civic and social issues.

When Jewish settlers did express their opinions on the matter of secular education, they were in favour of the Education Act.[12] In Ballarat, at a luncheon held in 1875 to celebrate the *bar mitzvah* of Maurice Hamburger, the Jewish minister Isaac Stone declared that he was 'glad to see Victoria had been the first to set England the example of compulsory education, and he found that his own children got on better at State schools than at private ones' ("A Jewish Confirmation" 5 Jul. 1875). Jews on the Central Victorian

Goldfields may have found little objection to the Education Act as it reflected earlier schooling practices of the community, as was discussed in the previous section. The preference for State schools noted by Stone was curious given that such schools could prove problematic for Jews, as Christian material was incorporated as part of the curriculum and passages from the New Testament were used in class readers ("Ballarat" 22 Aug. 1873; Serle 1971, 154). This suggests that their acceptance of the Education Act also contained performed aspects to screen the community from wider social reproach. The Education Act may have done little to shift the secular educational practices of Jewish children on the goldfields, however, they did radically alter the Hebrew schools and the experiences of children at these institutions.

After the Education Act, the sole purpose of the Hebrew schools was to teach children the knowledge needed to practice Judaism, turning these institutions effectively into a type of Sunday school ("Sandhurst Hebrew School" 29 Dec. 1882). In Ballarat, parents were required to pay enrolment costs for their children that covered the teacher's salary, a fee that was not required in Bendigo ("Sandhurst" 22 Sep. 1882; Spielvogel 1927). At the Ballarat Hebrew school, students received between four to five hours of religious instruction on weekdays with three hours on Sunday ("News and Notes" 26 Nov. 1874; Spielvogel 1927, 35). The ages of the children also varied, with some as young as six attending while others could be in their early or even mid-teens. Under the impact of colonial law, Hebrew schools developed into institutions that were required to meet the educational and religious needs of a range of children whose differences in age meant that they likely often differed in capabilities. The number of students attending the Hebrew schools in either Bendigo or Ballarat could range from anywhere between two and 50 students, revealing the fluctuating demographics ("Ballarat Hebrew School" 7 May 1875; "Sandhurst Hebrew School" 17 Jun. 1881; "Sandhurst Hebrew School" 29 Dec. 1882; "News and Notes" 31 Mar. 1874; "News and Notes" 11 Sep. 1876; "Ballarat" 16 Jun. 1893). When compared to wider colonial (or even more general Western) trends of school attendance at this period, such irregularity was common as parents made active decisions based on familial and financial needs (Larson 1986, 44). For parents with commercial businesses, which comprised a large section of the Jewish communities on the central goldfields, the reliance on the labour of their children likely influenced their attendance at Hebrew schools (Offer 2021, 73-75).

Similar to non-Jewish children, the formal religious education of Jewish children was also impacted by the financial and home economies that ascribed a value to the labour children performed. Whether they resided in the cities or in country areas, children were expected to contribute to the household, either aiding in farm work, family businesses, or attending to smaller children so that mothers could be freed for other labour (Grimshaw and Willett 1981, 149). Children as young as four or five could participate in household work,

either directly or indirectly supplementing the family economy (Grimshaw and Fahey 1985, 102-103). Jewish children often assisted in their parent's businesses, watching stores and serving customers. In 1875, Janet Hollander, the 16-year-old daughter of Ballarat storekeeper Jacob Hollander, was working in her father's shop when she suddenly fainted, dying soon after from apoplexy or stroke ("Deaths and Disasters" 5 Oct. 1875). This labour performed by Jewish youths facilitated contact between a range of individuals in colonial society, extending and increasing the interactions of children with different minorities. In 1866, Hermann Spielvogel, a young Jewish boy working in his father's shop in Ballarat, detailed to the police a conversation he had with an unnamed Chinese miner concerning a blanket. Spielvogel recounted how 'a Chinaman came in one day, and after looking at the defect, said, "By and bye it'll become a big hole," and refusing to buy, went out of the shop' ("Police" 7 Apr. 1866). The item was later stolen by David Bogan, who was found drunk and sleeping underneath the blanket. The work completed by children was a significant part of Jewish childhoods on the goldfields, helping to define the communal connections, experiences, and education of youths. The economic and home labour expected of Jewish children likely added to the stress and difficulties in operating Hebrew schools, a task which seemed to become more demanding across the rest of the century as they grappled with a declining community. Hebrew schools nevertheless emerged as important places of learning, identity, and community for Jewish children.

The Hebrew schools played a significant role in shaping the communal and social experiences of Jewish children. As Jan Kociumbas noted in her important work *Australian Childhood*, religious schools that operated outside of school hours had by the 1870s become a means through which aspirant families controlled their children's interactions with other children (Kociumbas 1997, 101). Amongst Christian faiths, the sending of children to Sunday schools was part of Sunday observance, particularly among the working-class, becoming a means to ensure children were raised as Christians and of familiarising the whole family with religious teachings (Steinbach 2012). Jewish parents may have also sought a similar end by sending their children to the Hebrew schools. Whilst Hebrew schools were important for the religious and language teaching provided, such schools were also a means through which parents could ensure their children interacted with and befriended other Jewish children. This may have allowed a sense of communal belonging to emerge, one that did not raise wider social suspicions as Sunday schools were a common religious institution. Fun activities were organised for the children attending the Hebrew school that further worked to create a sense of community. In both Bendigo and Ballarat, an annual picnic was held for the Jewish children attending the Hebrew schools with adult members of the congregation attending ("News and Notes" 8 Oct. 1880; "Ballarat" 25 Mar. 1881; "News and Notes" 25 Mar. 1881). Alongside such

communal gatherings, social and physical clubs were organised for children attending the Hebrew school, such as the Jewish Juvenile Fire Brigade.

As a social club, the Jewish Juvenile Fire Brigade mediated the middle-class values and communal religious identities of Jewish children, specifically the male pupils, further influencing ideas of gender, religion, and community. Amongst the wider community in Ballarat, numerous juvenile fire brigades formed according to the schools the children attended, with a Jewish Juvenile Fire Brigade established for the boys who attended the local Hebrew school ("News and Notes" 27 Jul. 1876). This Jewish Juvenile Fire Brigade often competed with fire brigades from other schools ("Our Churches and Clergy" 29 Jul. 1876). The forming of this fire brigade may have been the result of prevailing middle-class ideas concerning masculinity and maturity, which Jewish residents also shared in. Until the late nineteenth century, ideas of masculinity in Australia centred around the mind and spirit with schooling aiming to foster a state of moral as well as intellectual maturity whilst suppressing uncouth and unruly behaviour (Crotty 2000, 14). By the last quarter of the century, this view had begun to shift towards sports and athleticism as expressions of masculinity (Crotty 2000, 19). The fire brigade formed in the transitional stages between these two ideals, and as a result, reflected both views. The fire brigade was a voluntary organisation comprised of local persons who aimed to keep the community safe. It therefore held a moral element. Additionally, the fire brigade required physical fitness, connecting with the growing conception of protective masculine athleticism. A later photograph of the Ballarat Hebrew school (Figure 1 below) seems to confirm such conclusions, as the gathered children hold books, skipping ropes, and cricket bats, suggesting that both learning and athleticism were valued. Hebrew schools and related social activities influenced the transmission of gendered ideals to children, yet they were also in turn shaped by such notions. Clubs and events were both a response to and a perpetuation of shifting middle-class values for goldfields Jews, becoming a means to transfer and confirm the British identifications of goldfields Jews. Despite this significance, Hebrew schools faced many challenges over the coming decades.

Figure 1: Children at the Ballarat Hebrew School, circa 1902, Ballarat, Victoria Photographic print mounted on card, 202 x 240 mm. Donated by Valda Heyman, Jewish Museum of Australia Collection 9620.

As the century progressed, the Hebrew schools on the Central Victorian Goldfields became increasingly difficult to support and finance, mainly due to the issues of maintaining a head teacher. The struggle to employ and keep a head teacher resulted in a continual change in schoolmasters. The Ballarat Hebrew school often engaged a head teacher to oversee the institution with the Jewish minister, Israel Goldreich, acting as assistant. There were, however, periods when Goldreich assumed the role of lead instructor ("Ballarat" 7 Apr. 1882; "Ballarat" 6 Oct. 1882). Despite Goldreich's ability to act as a replacement, there were intervals during which the Hebrew school closed, a result of either the minister's absence or his ill health. In Bendigo, teaching fell more heavily on the Jewish minister, who was expected to give daily instruction to children in addition to his other duties as religious and congregational leader. This dual role may have impacted the standard of

formal education. In 1880, Isidore Myers assumed the role of Jewish minister in Bendigo as well as the position of head teacher at the local Hebrew school, where he found 'some fourteen children, but few of whom had any knowledge of Hebrew or religion' ("Sandhurst" 17 Jun. 1881). Myers was employed within the same year that Isaac Stone retired from the Bendigo Hebrew congregation as Jewish minister. The gap between head teachers for the Hebrew school was small, yet the children, by Myers' account, were largely uninformed. Such evidence suggests that the various demands made on the Jewish minister's time did impact the quality or consistency of teaching received. This issue regarding teachers and the ability of ministers to instruct children continued to worsen as parental indifference grew.

In the late 1890s, the Ballarat Hebrew congregation repeatedly lamented the lack of interest in the Hebrew school ("Ballarat" 10 Jun. 1898). State schools could further exasperate the issue with examinations at times scheduled during the hours set for Hebrew instruction, forcing Jewish parents to prioritise one education over the other, an issue that Christian students did not face ("News and Notes" 7 Sep. 1875). The irregular attendance of children may have also been the result of parents disliking the methods of the teacher or the Jewish minister, preferring their children to either attend occasionally or not at all as a result ("Ballarat" 22 Aug. 1884). The inconsistency in both teachers and teaching practices in the Hebrew schools may have had a detrimental effect, potentially aiding to lessen the concern of parents regarding a formal Hebrew education. This weakening of consideration shaped not only the type of religious education Jewish children received, but also whether they received this instruction at all. Other evidence suggests, however, that for certain periods the Hebrew schools provided an exceptionally high level of teaching and religious learning, particularly for Jewish girls.

'A sufficient religious education for their daughters': Jewish girls and Hebrew education

Across the nineteenth century, institutional religious education in Western Jewish communities expanded to incorporate Jewish girls, providing them the opportunity to engage as scholars and pupils in Hebrew schools. In colonial Victoria, this expansion was connected to rising British ideologies of domesticity amongst the Jewish community, which linked religion, education, and women. In an 1880 article published in the Melbourne-based *Jewish Herald* on 'Female Education,' the unnamed 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' ("Female Education" 9 Jan. 1880). This portrayal was a significant deviation from traditional views in Orthodox Judaism where it was men who were ascribed a central religiosity in which fathers taught religion to sons and

Jewish men engaged in public worship as well as private study. The writer of 'Female Education' not only viewed women as being innately religious, but believed that this was an aspect of women's attributes that needed to be further developed: 'though its germ is undoubtedly innate in woman, it must be cultivated … before it can ripen into fruit-producing maturity' ("Female Education" 9 Jan. 1880). For Jewish women and girls in colonial Victoria, their increased religious and moral role was contrasted with their education, or rather a lack of one. Historically, most Jewish girls were not taught Hebrew nor given a formal education in Judaism.[13] Instead, the generational transmission of religious knowledge was reliant on male scholars (Sartori 2004, 1). This form of transference shifted in the nineteenth century, mainly in the New World and Europe, which increasingly ascribed importance and value to the education of girls as a means to ensure the survival of Judaism (Sartori 2004, 1). Similar ideas were expressed in the Victorian colony by the Jewish community who increasingly linked Jewish mothers and the early training of children to the continued existence of Judaism (Offer 2021, 158-169). The expansion in schooling for girls was connected to middle-class feminine ideas concerning their perceived roles as mothers and wives, which required education to perform these functions adequately (Jordan 1991, 442). The rapid growth of schools in the colony, particularly girls' schools, in burgeoning middle-class suburbs further deepens this connection between class and education (Davison 1978, 248). For the Jewish community, these gender and feminine ideals widened the religious education of Jewish girls in the colony, and in the process influenced their childhood experiences of faith and community.

On the Central Victorian Goldfields, Jewish girls became active and competent students in the Hebrew schools and at times even outnumbered the male pupils ("News and Notes" 11 Sep. 1876). Visitors to the Ballarat Hebrew school often remarked on the proficiency and willingness of the female pupils, with Mr. M. Moses noting in 1880 'the unusual standard of proficiency attained, by the girls especially' ("On the Sabbath" 13 Feb. 1880). In the same year, Mr. Pulver also commented on the excellent education of girls in the Ballarat Hebrew school, stating that he had 'visited the school again to-day, and [was] delighted with the proficiency displayed by the higher class girls. ... I could not help noticing at the same time their attentive manner and willingness to study' ("The Ballarat Hebrew School" 8 Oct. 1880). Although it cannot be known the exact level of Hebrew reached nor what Moses considered to be the standard, female students were recognised as competent and enthusiastic students, even surpassing their male peers. This access to faith instruction seems to have positively altered the educational experiences of Jewish girls. While the Jewish community enrolled their daughters into Hebrew schools in ever increasing numbers, gendered biases continued to constrain the educational experiences of Jewish girls.

Gendered disparities impacted the value ascribed to and the type of religious instruction received by Jewish children, which resulted in different educational and schooling experiences. As an example, in 1882, an article published in the Jewish Herald discussed student attendance at the East Melbourne Hebrew school and revealed the gendered ideas and practices permeating the religious education of Jewish children. As the author noted, the age of the pupils at the East Melbourne Hebrew school ranged from four to 19, however, 'nearly all the elder pupils [were] girls' ("East Melbourne Hebrew School" 29 Dec. 1882). In the highest class, the average age of male students was recorded as 12 years and one month compared to the female students who averaged 15 years and ten months. The author of the article suggested that this large discrepancy in age was due to the beliefs parents held over what was considered adequate religious education for their sons compared to their daughters. As the writer found, 'many parents avail themselves of private tuition for their sons, while they consider attendance at the School a sufficient religious education for their daughters' ("East Melbourne Hebrew School" 29 Dec. 1882). Similar views may have been also held in Bendigo and Ballarat, where male pupils seem to suddenly disappear from prize lists after their *bar mitzvah*. Male pupils may have been removed after their *bar mitzvah* so that they could focus on secular schooling or potential careers, perhaps aiding parents more in their businesses. Whilst removing male pupils earlier may have held perceived economic, (secular) educational, or social benefits by parents, the prolonged involvement of Jewish girls in Hebrew schools could also prove useful.

Similar narratives of Jewish girls attending the Hebrew schools well beyond 12 years old, the age of religious majoring for girls in Judaism, were found on the goldfields. In Bendigo, Solomon Herman continued to send his daughter, Rose Herman, to the Hebrew school even after she reached 12 years of age. Rose, a competent and intelligent student, frequently won prizes from both the local State school she attended as well as from the Bendigo Hebrew school, where she was recognised for her work as a pupil teacher ("News and Notes" 20 May 1881; "Sandhurst Hebrew School" 17 Jun. 1881; "The Bendigo Advertiser" 24 Dec. 1883). The role of a pupil teacher was often given to older students who were more advanced in their studies and was likely assigned to Rose as a means to assist the Jewish minister. Older Jewish girls occupied a middle ground between Victorian ideals and Judaism, learning a limited amount of religious knowledge while occupying middle-class feminine roles such as student and class helper well into their teens. Similar to boys, the prolonged involvement of Jewish girls in Hebrew schools was likely shaped by the economic, social, and communal views held concerning unmarried women and young girls. As a middle-class community, girls were less likely to enter the workforce than boys, which may have contributed towards longer periods of institutional religious education. Jewish girls may have also been kept longer at Hebrew schools as a means to limit

their contact with non-Jewish peers, ensuring that daughters remained in the safe confines of the community until their marriage (Kociumbas 1997, 101). The religious education of Jewish girls in part acted as an aspect of the Jewish community's rising middle-class identity as well as their commitment to Judaism, yet it was also defined by such aspects. The religious educational experiences of Jewish girls were not only about instilling religious knowledge and values, aspects that were also learnt in the home and synagogue, but also about gender, community, and class.

Conclusion

Whether their experiences of these schools were positive or negative, Jewish children in Hebrew schools were placed firmly within a network of Jewish institutions and communal life that helped to shape the civic, social, and religious dimensions of their lives and identities (Klapper 2001, 238). Though the educational experiences of Jewish children in many respects reflected those of non-Jewish children, they also faced unique challenges. Jewish parents were often required to reconcile their children's Jewish education against a state school system that prioritised a Christian framework and at times disadvantaged Jewish students. Yet despite this, the rising middle-class position of the Jewish community provided significant religious educational opportunities to Jewish children, particularly for Jewish girls. This access to religious education likely had a major impact on the longer-term opportunities for middle-class Jewish women, mainly regarding their ability to become economically independent as they became teachers and governesses (Offer 2021, 170). Alongside such advantages, the Hebrew schools also significantly influenced the social, communal, and cultural ideas of Jewish children. The Hebrew schools engendered a communal Jewish identification by providing both a place and an arena of shared activity, symbols, and relations that children could regularly engage with and incorporate into their identities. Through the Hebrew schools, Jewish children on the goldfields were also encouraged to adopt British middle-class values, tastes, and ideas, playing games such as cricket and joining social clubs that drew heavily upon British ideals.

The identities assigned to youths and those developed by children mediated the dichotomies between Victorian British and Jewish ideas, contesting the boundaries between a British and Jewish identity. Like their non-Jewish counterparts, Jewish children attended similar secular and religious schools outside of state school hours and they engaged in similar recreational activities. Jewish children, however, also reinforced their difference through certain ritual practices like a *bar mitzvah* and through familial, social, and cultural activities and symbols. This combination of shared and separate activity fostered imaginings to emerge of a distinctly Jewish group whilst ensuring that any boundaries drawn did not become overly particularistic.

Endnotes

1. This project is funded by the Australian Research Council through a linkage grant: LP160100099 Faith on the Goldfield.
2. The holidays in which 'Learning' is upheld include Shevuoth and Hoshana Rabba. Shevuoth, or Shavuot, is also known as the '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. Hoshana Rabba is considered the final day of God's judgement, and the last chance for adherents to gain atonement. This holiday also 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. ('Hoshana Rabba' 2007. In *Encyclopaedia Judaica*)
3. Todd Endelman also discusses Jewish education and schooling, in Todd Endelman, *The Jews of Britain, 1656 to 2000* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002).
4. The ideas and rituals surrounding childhood in Judaism are interpreted from the Torah through the codification of the oral law in the Mishnah and Talmud, which were then later expanded upon in commentaries. Such commentaries led Jewish authorities to discuss conceptions of sex, education and rearing, the nature of childhood, and legal obligations of children. The examination of Jewish childhoods comprises a small yet growing area of literature. For examples, see Elisheva Baumgarten, *Mothers and Children: Jewish Family Life in Medieval Europe* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2004); Hagith Sivan, *Jewish Childhood in the Roman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Ivan G. Marcus, *Rituals of Childhood: Jewish Acculturation in Medieval Europe* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998); Mayer Kirshenblatt and Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett,. *They Called Me Mayer July: Painted Memories of a Jewish Childhood in Poland before the Holocaust* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); Amram Tropper, "The Economics of Jewish Childhood in Late Antiquity." *Hebrew Union College Annual* no. 76 (2005): 189-233.
5. The gold rush to Bendigo and Ballarat further dispossessed the Indigenous population, the Wathaurong, who first populated the area in and around Ballarat with the Boro gundidj language group based along the Yarrowee River, and the Dja Dja Wurrung (Jaara) clans of the Kulin Nation in Bendigo.
6. A synagogue can exist without a rabbi or a *chazzan* with religious services being conducted by lay people. A group of members from the community see to the operation, repair, and maintenance of the synagogue.
7. The Jewish ministers employed in Bendigo and early Ballarat moved often, traveling between colonial congregations. In Bendigo, at least five Jewish ministers were employed between 1855 and 1900. In order, they were: Isaac

Friedman employed until 1868, Isaac Stone between 1870-74 and then again between 1876-80, Isidore Myers between 1880-85, D. H. Harris from 1885-88, and J. D. Goldstein from 1890.

8. The term 'Jewish minister' derived from external sources and was a Christian construct, yet it was widely employed by contemporaries. Jewish clergymen were often referred to as 'ministers', as they usually had not attained a recognised *s'micha*, which would have ordained them as rabbis. In Bendigo and Ballarat, the Hebrew congregations and the wider non-Jewish society referred to those employed by the synagogue as reverend or minister. Later in the century, Jewish ministers were referred to as rabbi within newspapers, demonstrating the shift away from this term that is no longer used today. To avoid confusion, this article will adopt the term used by early contemporaries, referring to those employed by the synagogue who may have lacked the education of a rabbi as a 'Jewish minister'.

9. The article details the picnic organised by Rev. Isidore Myers for the children attending the local Hebrew school.

10. For more information on the Education Act of 1872 and its effects, see Ann Larson, "Growing Up in Melbourne: Transitions to Adulthood in the Late Nineteenth Century" (PhD thesis, Australian National University, 1986).

11. The Education Act of 1872 was a divisive issue for Presbyterians as the act recalled the disastrous schism in the Presbyterian Church of Scotland over voluntarism.

12. See "The Jews and the Education Act." *Argus*, 14 Oct. 1878, 7; "The Jews and the Education Act." *Argus*, 16 Oct. 1878, 10; "The Jews and the Education Act." *Argus*, 20 Aug. 1877, 7.

13. Though rare, instances do appear of Jewish women who were highly educated in Hebrew and Jewish texts, usually daughters of Hebrew scholars. An example is the daughters of Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki, also known as Rashi, an eleventh century scholar. The three daughters of Rabbi Yitzchaki, Yocheved, Miriam, and Rachel, were said to have possessed an unusual level of Torah scholarship. For more information on Rashi and his daughters, see Elie Wiesel, *Rashi* (New York: Schocken Books, 2009).

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