

A NOTE ON THE PUBLICATION OF BRYCE ROSS'S *DIGGINGS' DIRECTORY*

THROUGHOUT 1852–1853, Bryce Ross was a correspondent and agent for the *Melbourne Morning Herald*: his regular column, 'Mems from the Mount', played an important role in keeping Melburnians and prospective diggers in touch with conditions on the goldfields. His agency tent at Forest Creek was one of the many goldfields scenes painted by S.T. Gill.¹ As Ross conceived it, his directory was to be a grand project, covering first the diggings in the vicinity of Forest Creek and Mount Alexander, then expanding to include the Bendigo, Ballarat and Ovens diggings and new rushes as they occurred. Knowing that the goldfields population was notoriously nomadic, the lists were to be regularly revised.²

Only one copy of the directory is known to have survived, in the Mitchell Library.³ Ferguson (7609) notes that it comprises three sections (two directories and an 1853 Almanac), each with separate pagination. Because of the presence of the Almanac, he gives the publication date as '1853'. The first section lists the population in the Forest Creek area: it was probably printed in November 1852, a revision of an earlier version. A Forest Creek directory is first mentioned in the *Argus* on 12 May 1852, where it is referred to as 'just published'. Ross, in his column on 22 May, acknowledges it as his 'humble publication'. In both columns it is referred to as the *Diggers' Directory*, which is at variance with the later title, *Diggings' Directory*. Unfortunately, there are no advertisements for this earlier publication against which to check the title or to gain an idea of the contents. In section one of the extant edition, however, Ross's Agency is listed as being two doors from Marks and Davis's Adelaide Stores and next door to the *Argus* Office. He did not move to this site until early June 1852, after the first version of the directory had appeared.⁴

The first advertisement for the *Diggings' Directory* appeared in the *Melbourne Morning Herald* on 6 November 1852: 'NOW PUBLISHED. — NO.1. BRYCE ROSS'S DIGGINGS' DIRECTORY for Forest Creek, Bendigo, Ballarat, the Ovens and other new Diggings' This advertisement seems to refer to a more comprehensive directory but I consider that it served to notify prospective buyers of the extent of the proposed series and that only No.1, the Forest Creek directory, was then available. In the introduction to section one, Ross states that:

Directories of Bendigo, Ballarat, the Ovens and all the newest Diggings, are now in the course of preparation by B.R. for immediate publication in order to appear in time with each month's issue of Bonwick's "Diggers' Magazine".

The first issue of Bonwick's magazine appeared in October 1852.⁵ This date also supports the proposition that section one is a revised version of the May directory and that it was published in November 1852, since it is unlikely that Ross would have proposed placing future lists in that magazine unless it was already in circulation.

The second section comprises the promised Bendigo and Ballarat directories. It was compiled in the latter half of 1852 and printed in time to be bound up with the 1853 Almanac and existing copies of section one and offered for sale by 10 January 1853. Until 4 January 1853 the initial advertisement had reappeared intermittently. It was then replaced by a statement that an 1853 Almanac and Ross's 'Directories of Forest Creek, Ballarat and Bendigo Diggings' were 'just publishing': the Ovens and new diggings are no longer mentioned and the advertisement accurately reflects the contents of section two. A paragraph at the end of the Bendigo directory gives a summary of businesses on those diggings in December 1852, a further indication that section two was printed in January 1853.

Ross was a flamboyant and somewhat unstable character who did not make a fortune on the goldfields. After leaving his agency, he was variously employed as a schoolmaster, estate agent and gardener until committing suicide on 16 February 1870.⁶

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NOTES

¹ Gill's painting is held by the State Library of Victoria.

² Introduction to section one.

³ *Bryce Ross's Diggings' Directory* (Melbourne, Printed by R. Connebee, 174 Elizabeth Street, [1853]). Pp. 12, 12, [4], (Almanac for 1853) [2 blank].

⁴ *Melbourne Morning Herald*, 5 June 1852.

⁵ The title of Bonwick's magazine was the *Australian Gold Diggers' Monthly*. Eight issues appeared between October 1852 and May 1853. There is a puff for the directory in the January number: 'This indefatigable Diggings Agent has *now* produced Directories of Mount Alexander, Bendigo, and Ballarat . . .' (emphasis added). Ross's new lists were not included in the magazine.

⁶ For a short biography of Ross see the forthcoming study by M.G. Sullivan in *Not So Eminent Victorians* (Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1984).

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