



Digging for Gold in Victoria

Jennifer McNeice looks at websites for discovering your Australian goldminer ancestors

GOLD RUSHES AROUND THE WORLD IN THE 1800s caused massive population shifts and could explain what happened to a missing ancestor. There are many free on-line tools to help find genealogical gold, including contextual information and name records.



Iron Bark diggings, S.T. Gill, from *The Victorian Gold Fields* 1852–3. (State Library Victoria, Out of Copyright)

Chain Reactions

Population movement in gold rushes changed local economies. While the pace of new arrivals overwhelmed gold rush sites, other areas were left with labor shortages. Australia fell into economic depression when thousands of men left in search of California gold.

In response, colonial governments offered rewards for finding gold. This led to discoveries in New South Wales, a rush there, and greater finds in Victoria, all within a few months in 1851. The National Museum of Australia has detailed information, www.nma.gov.au/defining-moments/resources/gold-rushes.

American influence

Americans were noted for bringing new technology to the goldfields and new ideas to business. George Francis Train was one American who made an impact in Melbourne, the capital of Victoria. He arrived in 1853 as a 24-year-old merchant. During his two-year stay he built substantial warehouses in Melbourne and at Sandridge where ships were unloaded. He became an active member of the Chamber of Commerce and helped to form a volunteer fire brigade.

Train's letters were published in the *Boston Post*. You can see some of them online in *An American Merchant in Europe, Asia and Australia*, <https://archive.org/details/anamericanmerch00traigoog>. The Australian letters were also published in *A Yankee Merchant in Gold Rush Australia* (Heinemann, Melbourne, 1970). The online title has a wider scope, but omits approximately half of the letters and some introductory paragraphs that are included in the printed book. Part 1, chapter 1 online is the final chapter of the printed book and earlier letters are in Part 2. Read more about Train in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, <https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/train-george-francis-4745>.

Starting Victorian Genealogy

Some useful sites to start your search for ancestors in Victoria:

- Government registrar BMD www.bdm.vic.gov.au/research-and-family-history/search-your-family-history
- Wills and probate <https://prov.vic.gov.au/explore-collection/explore-topic/wills-and-probates>