

The diary formerly known as ‘Lazarus’

Australian Manuscripts Collection MS 13518

Acquired 2006

It was 2012 and I had begun to suspect that all was not what it seemed with one of my favourite items in State Library Victoria’s collection. ‘The Lazarus Diary’, as the manuscript was known and subsequently catalogued when the Library purchased it at auction in 2006, was a gilded treasure: an eye-witness account of the Eureka Stockade written not by a partisan miner but a disinterested onlooker. It was a diary that recounted in daily detail the conditions of life on the Ballarat goldfields, the tensions leading up to the miners’ rebellion, and the deadly dawn charge of the British authorities on 3 December 1854 and its aftermath, in equal parts tragic and mundane.

Acquired with support from a State Library Foundation appeal, the diary was digitised and eulogised. It was a striking complement to the Library’s already impressive collection of gold-rush manuscripts. The diary shows the author’s keen eye for human detail. It records the fact, previously overlooked, that a woman was killed in the battle at Eureka, her coffin ‘draped with white and followed by a respectable and sorrowing group’. But subsequent research on 19-year-old Liverpoolian Samuel Lazarus, the diary’s purported author, led me to question the provenance. Fast forward through six months of research, and the Library’s catalogue was changed to reflect the true author: Charles Evans.¹

Charles James Evans was born in Shropshire, England, in 1827. He sailed for Victoria in 1852 with his brother George. The Evans brothers tried their hand at a few different colonial enterprises (timber carting, a confectioner’s business) before walking the crowded road to Ballarat. They were briefly auctioneers before settling into social prominence and financial success as printers and stationers, becoming part of the stable mercantile class of Ballarat.

And yet Charles Evans’ name did not live on through the legacy of his youthful, energetic, wide-eyed diary. A strange twist of fate in its ownership, and the fact that Charles never inscribed his little notebook with his moniker, meant that another man’s name became attached to one of the most treasured items in the Library’s collection. Stranger still, it turned out that the Library already possessed a corner piece in this historical puzzle: the diary of George Evans, kept during roughly the same time period as Charles’ diary, an archival twin, separated at birth by an administrative mix-up.

It felt good to finally put the record to rights. Read the full story of my research journey from ‘Lazarus Diary’ to ‘Evans Diary’ in *The La Trobe Journal* no. 90.

Monday Dec 4th -

I have witnessed today I think
 some of the most melancholic spec-
 tacles with the exception of yesterday's
 horrid display it had ever been my
 misfortune to see. - A number
 of the poor brave fellows who fell
 in yesterday, cowardly massacre
 were buried. - One of the coffin train^s
 with white & followed by a respectable
 and sorrowing group was the body of
 a woman who was mercifully butchered
 by a mounted trooper while she was
 pleading for the life of her husband.
 The mind recoils with horror & disgust from
 the thought that an Englishman can be
 found capable of an act so monstrous
 & inhuman. - Poor Ross the Canadian
 who died this morning after suffering great
 agony from his wounds was buried among
 the rest - His funeral was attended by about
 300 of his fellow diggers. - There were