

Shane Carmody
Lazarus Rising

COUNTING SHEEP WAS important in colonial Victoria. The clergy recording baptisms equated with squatters checking the flocks and baptismal records are the proxy for births where official registration is absent. No record survives for Ned Kelly's birth or baptism and his birthdate is unknown. But, just as in nature, myth abhors a vacuum, and in folklore Kelly was born on 3 December 1854, the date of the Eureka rebellion.

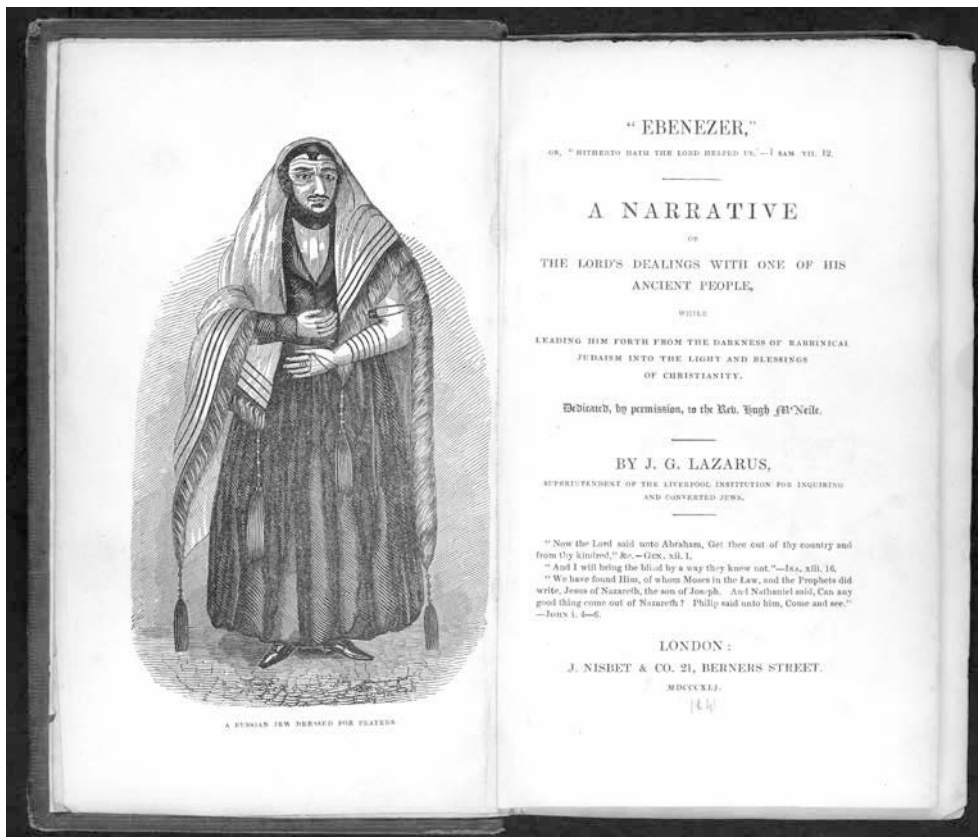
Such a neat synchronicity gained a veneer of borrowed truth when the Library triumphantly acquired the diary of Samuel Lazarus. Hailed as the only eyewitness account of Eureka, its author had a second moment in history as the foreman of the jury that convicted Ned Kelly in 1880 on the charge of murder.

The purchase was made under intense scrutiny and pressure in 2006. The diary was well known to the Library. After its discovery in a trunk of old documents in 1996, it was shown to the then Manuscripts Librarian, Jock Murphy, and a photocopy was made for reference use. The diary was soon up for sale at auction, and the Library made a valiant effort only to fall short to a private collector. In July 2006, Jock Murphy informed me it was up for sale again, and soon I had calls from the Director of the Art Gallery of Ballarat and from the Director at Sovereign Hill encouraging the Library to bid to ensure that it stayed in Victoria as the diary was a prize for any collection in a competitive market that included the National Museum of Australia. Budgets were consulted, and the Board resolved to boost the available funds through use of bequests. The auction took place on 5 September 2006, and I nervously awaited a call. When it came, we had won the prize, and in the following days the historian Clare Wright wrote a fine and congratulatory piece that was published on the opinion pages of the *Age*. The Library moved quickly to digitise the diary and soon after it was on loan to the Gold Museum in Ballarat for a special display and after that at the Art Gallery of Ballarat.

The diary became one of the items often used in talks and events at the Library and, as the speaker on many such occasions, I drew on the connection with Ned Kelly and often made the joke about how the Diary, like the biblical Lazarus, had risen again, to reinforce a point that if the Library missed a purchase and it went to a private collector, we simply had to be patient as it would reappear.

Clare Wright used the diary in her research on the women of Eureka, and a few short months ago stopped me in the Library foyer to say she had doubts about the attribution of the diary to Samuel Lazarus. Doubt is a very troubling thing to a Director who had championed the spending of \$100,000 on an item of apparently impeccable provenance. I returned to my office and in the busy days that followed set aside my anxieties for more pressing concerns.

I was in Hobart when I got an email from Clare with a draft of the article that follows. What I read was a story even more remarkable than the one we thought we knew, and so dear reader, read on...



Frontispiece and title page of J. G. Lazarus, *Ebenezer ...*, 1841