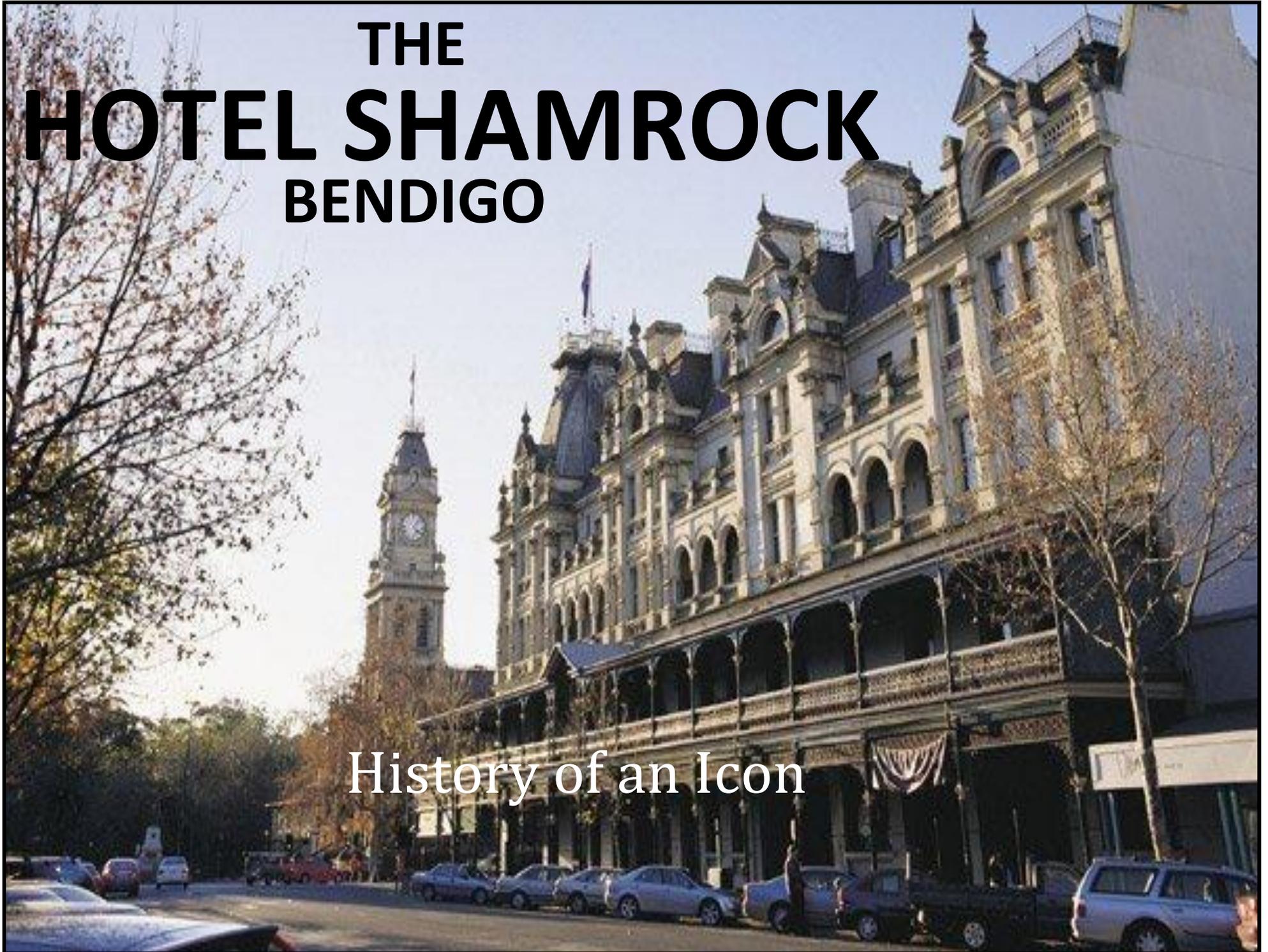


# THE HOTEL SHAMROCK BENDIGO

History of an Icon



## History of an Icon

No other building is more closely associated with the Bendigo story than the Hotel Shamrock. Originating in the roaring days of gold fever, the hotel grew out of a restaurant, the Royal Exchange, opened by Joseph Carncross in early 1854. He added the Theatre Royale the same year, in which the first theatrical production in Bendigo was staged.

The theatre was chosen as the venue for the first land sales held in Sandhurst (as Bendigo was then known), and for the occasion was issued with the first license to sell spirits and fermented drinks.

In August of that year, Carncross sold his theatre and restaurant to two Irishmen, William "Billy" Heffernan and John Crowley. Heffernan, the senior partner, was a man of enterprise. A liquor license was soon obtained, and a hotel and concert hall erected on this site. Not surprisingly, they called it the "Shamrock".

The Shamrock Concert Hall, as it was known, opened in March of 1858 and was soon the hub of entertainment for the Goldfields. No admission was charged; profits were derived from the sale of drinks and cigars. Each night on closing, a porter swept the floor and cleaned the dust and clay left by the diggers' boots.

The Shamrock lacked nothing; it had a permanent orchestra and conductor, its own theatre company, and engaged the top touring artist of the day. An English writer claimed that "Nothing outside of London could match it". The Shamrock Concert Hall proved an enormous success, netting its owners a profit of some \$600.00 per night. The first two years saw them richer by something akin to a million dollars in today's values.

So successful was the venture, Heffernan and Crowley decided in 1858 to refurbish the hall and the hotel. Unfortunately, the rebuilding had hardly been completed before a fire broke out on Christmas Day, 1857, and largely gutted the hotel. Heffernan was undeterred. As the original Shamrock had been an architecturally uninspired building, he seized the opportunity to erect a hotel that would outshine anything else in town. Local architects Vahland and Gertzmann were

commissioned to prepare plans, and by 1860, the second Shamrock had risen on the site.

The new Hotel Shamrock exceeded all expectations. It could boast of some thirty bedrooms, private parlors, a huge commercial room, dining rooms, bars, a smoking saloon, and a bowling alley in the basement.

By now, Sandhurst was growing rapidly, so much so that it did not have time to become a town. It jumped from being a borough to a city, by proclamation. In 1871 it grabbed Australia's attention in producing Australia's first great quartz mining boom. More than one thousand mining companies were registered on that field. Day long queues of investors stretched along Pall Mall from the Shamrock to the Beehive Mining Exchange. At the height of the boom, on the 25<sup>th</sup> of August, 1871, fire destroyed the latter; the Shamrock's spacious commercial room was transformed into a mining exchange to help cope with the deluge of investment in mining scrip.

In 1896, the Heffernan-Crowley partnership was amicably dissolved. Heffernan continued in the Shamrock, built St. James Hall opposite, and became involved in the establishment of the Royal Princess Theatre in View Street – described at the time as comparable to anything on Drury Lane. There, the greatest stars of the day performed; invariably, they stayed at the Shamrock.

Heffernan's luck began to desert him. His ventures involved heavily mortgaging the Shamrock – a mortgage he could not, in the end, meet. A lengthy lawsuit followed, and Heffernan was the loser; the Shamrock passed into other hands. Eventually another visionary acquired the Shamrock, Alfred Joseph.

The late 1880's saw the local mining industry still buoyant, and the Government still expressing confidence in Bendigo's future, with the erection of fine new buildings along Pall Mall. Joseph and his partner, Nat Sloman, decided to build a new Shamrock Hotel on the existing site that would match and complement the grandeur of the buildings now rising.

A protégé of Vahland, Phillip Arthur Kennedy, was chosen to prepare a design. Joseph was a man of means with extensive international investments, so cost meant little to him. Work on the demolition of the second Shamrock began in 1896.

In the following year, the third and final Shamrock arose, embracing some one hundred rooms. It was opulence on a grand scale, in the Italianate architectural style, exploiting the rich stucco ornamentation characteristic of the period. A spacious balcony enhanced with delicate iron lace provided a promenade of some two hundred thirty feet, and meals could be taken there *al fresco*.

Another feature of the new building was its sumptuous banquet hall and it was there, just shortly after opening that the Annual Victorian Conference of the Australian Natives Association met for their farewell dinner. It was to prove a momentous occasion. The Association was then the most powerful social organization in the land. The issue of Federation of the Australian colonies was also the most important issue of the day. The achievement of Federation rested strongly on securing the support of the ANA. As dinner in the Banquet Hall drew to a close, representatives of the ANA, in a scene of wild enthusiasm, made the crucial announcement. They would support Federation, and the headlines blazed with the news. The Federation of the colonies to form one nation was thus ensured.

In 1952, following the anxious days of World War II, the hotel was acquired by a New Guinea mining investor, Gerald Goudy Smith. On his untimely death, ownership passed to his widow, Joyce Evelyn Smith. A colourful figure, known locally as 'Diamond Lil', she identified closely with the local community and many a family in need was the recipient of her generous philanthropy.

In the years that followed, the coming of the motel seemed likely to spell the demise of the traditional hotel. Under various owners the Shamrock struggled on, until 1974 when the doors closed and the tinkle of glassware ceased. The Shamrock, it seemed, would be left to the ghosts of the famous who had passed through her doors; members of royalty, prime ministers, statesman, and stars of the stage. One of the last, and most famous, was Dame Nellie Melba, who demanded that the noisy clock of the Post Office be stopped, following a sleepless night.

A Bendigo without the Shamrock was unthinkable and almost immediately, community concern was mobilized. Threats of demolition were removed when the hotel was added to the first Register of Historic Buildings. It was offered at auction but passed in and shortly after, purchased by the State Government.

In 1974, in association with the Public Works Department, John Stoddart was entrusted with the task of returning the Shamrock to its former self, and in April 1981 with a skirl of pipes and re-enactment of the past, it re-opened.

In 1992, the State Government awarded the lease of the Shamrock to Clover Hotels Pty. Ltd. Under their management the hotel underwent many renovations respecting its heritage whilst accommodating the demand for contemporary facilities and services.

In the last 5 years under Hogan's Hotel Group the Shamrock has maintained its legendary status in Bendigo with the addition of the Victorian Wine Room, reviving the Shamrock's alfresco fine dining. As well as the Gold Dust Lounge opening after renovations were made on the downstairs basement, boasting an extensive range of beverages and many local bands performing live.

The Shamrock has many stories hidden in its walls, and many more to come as it approaches its second century. The town of Bendigo continues to take great pride in the hotel and the outstanding contribution it made to not only Bendigo's, but Australia's history.

All of our suites are named after personalities connected with the Hotel in the past or local areas significant to Bendigo

### **The Royal Princess Suite**

The Royal Princess was a theatre built by former owners of this hotel, Heffernan and Crowley. It was opened in 1874 and demolished in 1963 to make way for a service station. The theatre was named for those of the five daughters of Queen Victoria who were unmarried at the time.

### **The Alfred Joseph Suite**

Alfred Joseph was known as the 'Sandhurst Leviathan'. Sandhurst was once the name of the central Bendigo municipality. Although he was a big man physically, his nickname had nothing to do with his size, but was a reflection of his massive business dealings. His firm became one of the biggest financial

firms in Australia. Joseph came to Bendigo in 1869, became a bookkeeper, and started a money broking firm at a time when mining speculation was coming to a peak. He was a great sportsman and philanthropist. It was his vision and his money (as well as that of his partner, Nat Sloman) which built this hotel in 1897.

### **The Dame Nellie Melba Suite**

Nellie Melba's main claim to Bendigo fame is her stopping the Post Office clock from chiming at night. Her suite in this hotel during her Bendigo appearance in 1908 was right opposite the clock, whose chiming every quarter hour must have upset far less temperamental people. While this story has never been verified, it contains most of the elements of truth. Dame Nellie first came to Bendigo in February of 1889. Her appearance was for a farewell concert before going to Europe to complete her musical training. Her last appearance in Bendigo was in the Princess Theatre in 1921, when she was sixty years of age. It was another farewell.

### **The Charles Thatcher Suite**

Charles Thatcher is generally described as a comic singer. He was immensely popular and was one of a remarkable group of men on the early goldfield who helped make it the most peaceable in Australia. His songs were forever topical and satirised the follies of the high and mighty, and highlighted the troubles of the ordinary man. Thatcher sang, and men who were previously at the boiling point laughed at themselves and their anger. He was not above a little fisticuffs himself, however, and received a short term in jail himself. The logs were a jail – such a jail is preserved in Eaglehawk, beside the Court House. Thatcher died of cholera at the age of 47.

### **The Ravenswood Suite**

Ravenswood was the name of one of two sheep stations which first occupied Bendigo ground. It was here that the first Bendigo gold was found in 1851. It got its name from a property in Van Diemen's Land, who had gotten it from one of the novels of Sir Walter Scott. Ravenswood had an outstation hut almost on the site of the Shamrock, near Ravenswood's border with Barnedown station

in what is now northern Bendigo. The Bendigo flat had permanent water in a string of waterholes along the creek and some short-term pasturage for sheep. Before then, the valley was a route for Aborigines travelling from the Big Hill ranges to the plains north of Eaglehawk – the stony hills on either side of the valley being hard even on callused feet.

### **The Whipstick Suite**

The Whipstick is a forest north of Bendigo which comes almost into the suburb of Eaglehawk. It contains some of the most southern intrusions of mallee scrub, the spindly nature of which gave the forest its name. It was also famous for the gold and for the trackless nature of its terrain. The mallee is rich enough in eucalyptus oil to support an oil extraction industry; the forest also contained large stands of box and ironbark trees, and a rich assemblage of wildflowers, including the colourful Kamarooka. It is an arid area, but today contains a number of picnic spots and many trails.

### **The Lyceum Suite**

The Lyceum Theatre started life at the end of 1853 as the Casino and today is the home of the Bendigo Advertiser. In between it became the springboard for one of the most remarkable careers in Australia's mercantile history. Simcha Baevski moved from View Street in 1905 to open a drapery store in part of the building and three years later burst upon Melbourne as Sydney Myer. The building was remodelled as a theatre and hotel by Joseph Henry in 1858. It had a capacity of two thousand. The original owners of the hotel, Heffernan and Crowley, had an interest in it for a long time and attempted to popularise opera there with very cheap seats. They even had Chinese opera.

### **The Rosalind Suite**

The ultimate source of the name of the Rosalind Suite is the heroine of Shakespeare's As You Like It. She was a witty match-maker who lived carefree in the Forest of Arden. The name was suggested in June of 1861 by Councillor John Neill Macartney, who thought that one day the ground there would be "a miniature garden of Arden", but other councillors did not share his vision. Nevertheless, the name so pleased the people of the goldfield that it stuck. The

park once contained a number of goldmines; it was the site of the last great gold-rush on the Bendigo field. This was in March of 1859, but there was little gold.

### **The Alexander Suite**

The Alexander Suite commemorates the largest mountain in the Bendigo area. Mt. Alexander is located south of Bendigo, by the village of Harcourt. It was originally named Mt. Byng by Major Mitchell after a mountain in Spain which impressed him during the Peninsula War. At 741 meters Mt. Alexander provides some spectacular views of the surrounding countryside, and there are several quarries on its bow which provide high-grade granite. It gave its name to one of Melbourne's main northern outlets, Mt. Alexander Road, which led to the mighty Mt. Alexander goldfield (centred on Castlemaine) and the even mightier Bendigo goldfields.

### **The Lansell Suite**

The greatest of the mining speculators, and at one time the richest man in Australia, George Lansell began as a candle and soap maker. He was a man whose dogged persistence was only matched by his courage. Lansell became a great benefactor to the city of Bendigo and his influence in mining matters was so profound that the goldfield nearly collapsed when he decided to retire to London. He returned only after a widely endorsed petition was sent to him praying for his return. He came back and his return marked an immediate revival of mining in the district. Lansell's elaborate home, Fortuna, is now the home of the Army Topographic Support Establishment, and may be seen during Sunday tours.

### **The Amy Castle Suite**

Amy Castle, though not as well known, is said to have had a better voice than Dame Nellie Melba. Mrs. May Gaynor, a violinist who played for both declared "Amy Castle was miles better than Melba." Amy was one of a talented family. Her father, a Bendigo newspaperman, and her mother both had fine voices and their other children all had notable stage careers. After winning several medals at the Bendigo Juvenile Industrial Exhibition, frequent concerts and

competitions, she went on to study in Europe and sang in most of the grand opera houses of that continent. In Melbourne, she drew a crowd of twenty thousand to hear her sing at the Exhibition Building.

### **The Joseph Carncross Suite**

In 1853, when the goldfield was just two years old, Joseph Carncross opened the Royal Exchange Restaurant and so started the process which led to today's Shamrock Hotel. He started off auspiciously in October of that year with a fashionable wedding at the Bullock Creek to Edith Cutting. In November his restaurant, which included sleeping accommodations, was opened and he was already building a large assembly room beside it, which was to become the Theatre Royal.

Unfortunately, Carncross had over-reached himself, and although he had rosy prospects he was unable to repay his creditors. The forerunner of the first Bendigo Shamrock Hotel was sold to William Merry in February who sold it in August the following year to Heffernan and Crowley.

### **The Lola Montez Suite**

Lola Montez, once the *de facto* Queen of Bavaria, had English parents, and her real name was Marie Gilbert. She became a world-famous dancer and was the first solo dancer to visit Australia. She created a sensation in Ballarat by whipping the editor of the Times for printing uncomplimentary things about her, but Bendigo saw a more remarkable side of this spirited woman. She was performing a routine called The Little Devil on the stage of the Criterion Theatre when it was struck by lightning. It rent the roof, struck the stage near her, and ripped down about three metres of woodwork on the side of the building. There was panic in the crowded house, but she held up her arms and told the audience not to be frightened as she was certainly not frightened. Calm was restored. At the end of the act, to resounding applause, she was called forth and came before the curtain to announce that though she had often played The Little Devil she had never before played it with real thunder and lightning.

### **The Victoria Suite**

The Victoria Suite took its name from the great monarch who gave the world the British Empire, and gave her name to this Australian state and dozens of other places all over the world. She came to the throne two years before the first white men came with their sheep into the Bendigo valley; by the year she died Bendigo had a population of more than 46,000 and Australia had become a single nation. Some of Bendigo's great mines were named after her, and its richest gold-studded eminence is Victoria Hill. For those with even a vague interest in mining this hill is worth a visit and many of the points of interest there are sign-posted. On the hill is a lookout built on the poppet legs over what was once the deepest goldmine in the world – the Victoria Quartz.

### **The Sandhurst Suite**

Sandhurst was the third name applied to part of the Bendigo goldfield. First it was Bendigo, then, very briefly it became Castleton, apparently after a village in Derbyshire which is celebrated for its caves and mines. The name was then changed to Sandhurst, but this was applied only to the central local government area on the Bendigo goldfield. The name was chosen in honour of the Sandhurst Military College where many of the goldfields administrators were trained. It was thus always associated with authority, and was never popular. Despite that, it remained in place for thirty six years and was only changed after an overwhelming vote by ratepayers in 1891. A number of Bendigo institutions, including the Sandhurst Football Club, still bear the name.

### **The Phillip Kennedy Suite**

Phillip Kennedy's claim to Bendigo fame was that he was locally born and bred, was a pupil of the great William Vahland, and designed the present Shamrock building. This he did just as his master might have done. Kennedy's very considerable talents took him to Melbourne where he left his mark on many important buildings, including St. Vincent's Hospital and the Catholic Ladies' College of East Melbourne. He died at age 73 in May of 1916.

### **The Billy Heffernan Suite**

Billy Heffernan arrived in Bendigo in 1852 and went into partnership with John Crowley to build a restaurant in Auction Street, but when the town was surveyed and Auction Street was abolished he bought what had been Carncross's Royal Exchange Restaurant and Theatre Royal. He built the Shamrock Hotel and its concert hall on the site. Heffernan was a man of great energy, enterprise, and integrity and was involved in a number of other projects, including the Princess Theatre in View Street. He retired to his farm in Axedale in 1879 or 1880, but later went to New Zealand to manage a hotel for his sister-in-law, and then built a hotel for himself at Dunedin. He died there aged eighty-one in March of 1891.

### **The John Crowley Suite**

John Crowley came out of Cork in Ireland in 1853 and dug for gold in various Bendigo locations with fair success. With Billy Heffernan and others he established a restaurant on Bendigo Flat. It was called the Hibernian and occupied a huge tent. It was so successful that in two months each partner received a thousand pounds in profit. In May 1854, in partnership with Heffernan, he bought what was then the Royal Exchange Restaurant building, demolished it, and built the first Shamrock Hotel. They also built another hotel with the same name in Epsom and in two years made twenty thousand pounds out of them. Crowley left the partnership in 1869 but returned to Bendigo and bought much property, including the Albion Hotel and Albion Chambers. There, in partnership with Billy Heffernan, he built the magnificent Royal Princess Theatre. He died at his home in Bendigo in March of 1899, at the age of seventy-two.

### **The Nat Sloman Suite**

Nat Sloman did not live long to enjoy the fruits of his investment in the new Shamrock. The old building was knocked down in 1897, and Sloman died in July of 1899 at the age of sixty-six. During his time in Bendigo he had invested freely in mining ventures, and was one of those who combined an acute business sense with a bit of luck to make his fortune.