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THE FIRST GOLDFIELD

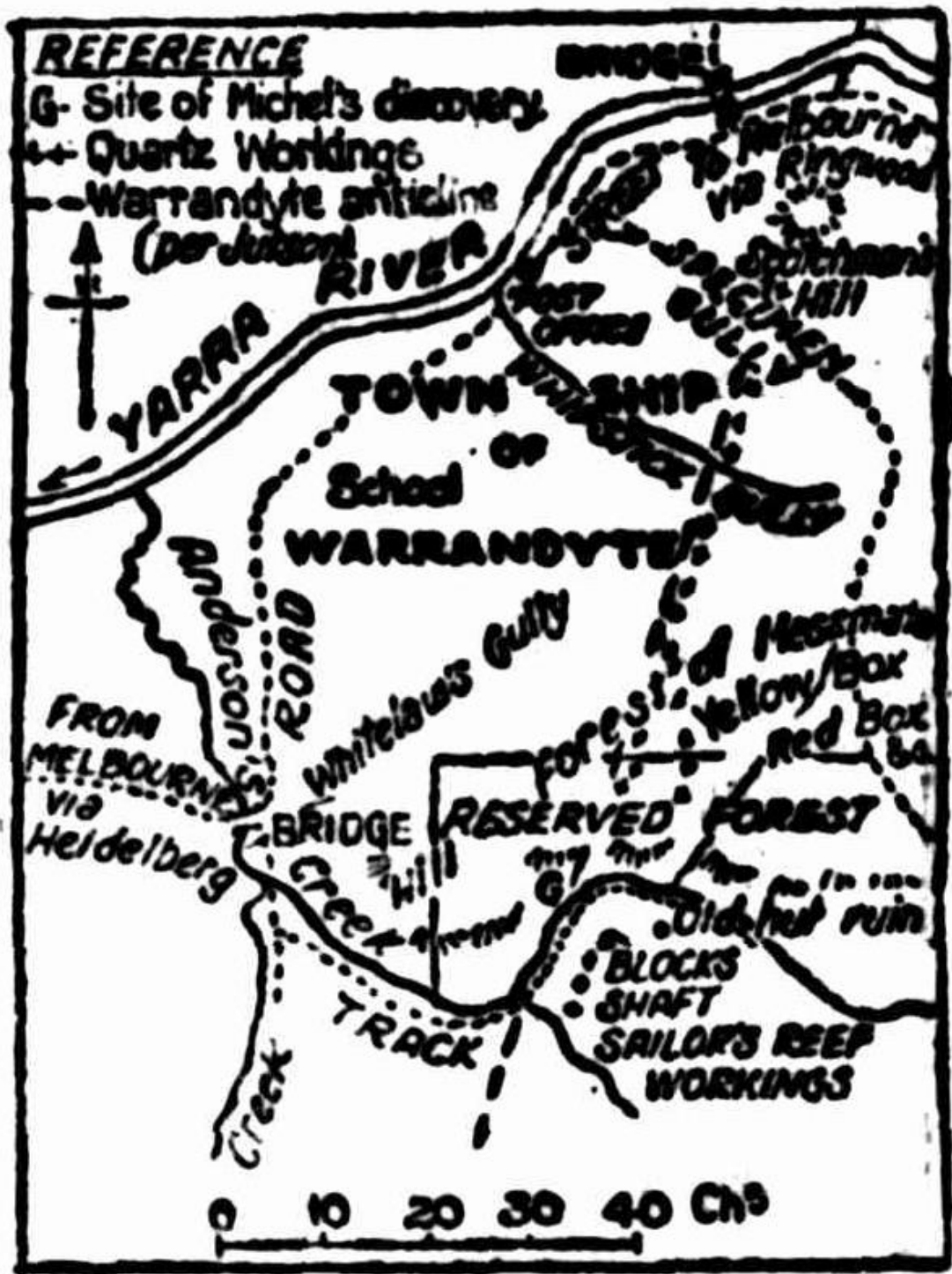
ANDERSON'S CREEK

By C. R. LONG

In 1839 there came from England to Melbourne by way of Sydney a lad of 14 years abounding in energy, mental and physical. He obtained employment in a grocer's shop that stood where the Collins street entrance to the Block arcade is to-day. Though his wages were small, he saved enough money to enable him to marry at the age of 19. He took his bride to a cottage on the slope of the hill not far from the site now occupied by the Assembly Hall. Louis John Michel, for that was his name soon became recognised as a civil, diligent citizen, and he was an active member of several of the organisations of the town. The profits to be derived from public-house keeping attracted him, and he became landlord of the Britannia Hotel, at one of the corners of Swanston and Lonsdale streets. After a time he moved to the Rainbow, which stood in a busier part of the town at the corner of Swanston and Little Collins streets, on the site of which are the Town Hall Chambers to-day.

In 1848 gold was discovered in California and Michel, in common with other business men, noticed with concern the departure of many able-bodied men for that distant region. Worse was to take place, however, for in May 1851, everyone was talking of the discovery of a goldfield in the Bathurst district of New South Wales by Hargraves, a miner who had returned from California. Nothing more was needed than the finding, in July, by a blackfellow near the same locality of a huge nugget, Kerr's Hundredweight, to give scores of men in Melbourne the gold fever and to set them traveling to this new and less distant Eldorado.

Those residents of Melbourne who had perforce to remain pondered over the news which "The Argus" supplied almost every day about the gold discoveries at the Ophir and on the Turon, and they learned also from their reading and conversation one



Map showing the traditional site (G.) of Michel's workings early in 1851.

with another a good deal about gold in quartz and alluvial gold and something of the use of the cradle and of the and of panning-off wash-dirt. Soon parties were formed to go out prospecting in the hope of discovering the precious metal nearer home The Mayor of

Melbourne (William Nicholson) called a public meeting in the Mechanics' Institute, now the Athenaeum, and a strong committee was formed to take steps to ensure a still more active search. On that gold discovery committee appear names that are still familiar to many Victorians such for example as those of John (afterwards Sir John) O'Shanassy, Richard Heales J. P. Fawkner and William Westgarth The committee lost no time in announcing the offer of a "reward of 200 guineas for the finding of a workable goldmine or deposit within 200 miles of Melbourne, capable of being wrought to advantage."

An Energetic Prospector

Michel had not waited for an incentive of this kind. He was one of those who had formed a party and started on the search. This party (himself, W Habberlin. James Furnival. James Melville, J Heidon and B Greenig) was already some miles up the Yarra, diligently tracing its tributaries and trying here and there for the "colour." On the last day of June, in the neighbourhood of the Deep Creek, now better known as the Mullum Mullum, flowing from the south-east into the Yarra, not far from Eltham, gold in quartz was discovered, and the reef was traced for some distance. The place where the gold was found was shown on July 5 to Dr. Webb-Richmond, as the representative of the gold discovery committee. It was in the bed of Anderson's Creek, and, according to the local tradition, was a mile or so up the creek from its junction with the Yarra. More important to the public was the information that the "find" was about 17 miles from Melbourne, in the vicinity of Warrandyte. On July 5 full particulars were communicated to Lieutenant-Governor Latrobe. The committee met on July 16, and expressed satisfaction with the sample of gold submitted by Michel and the newspapers announced on the following day the existence and whereabouts of the discovery. On August 4 further discoveries were communicated to the committee by Michel's party It was said to have obtained with only shovel and tin dish among the alluvial deposits gold, minute but tolerably abundant

By this time the Government had become interested and a Crown Lands Commissioner (N. A. Fenwick) was instructed to make inquiries on the spot and report On August 6 he, with several members of the gold discovery committee including the secretary (H. J. Hart) and a jeweller (H. Walsh) set out for Andersons Creek. Several members of the party tried their luck with tin dishes, and every dishful of wash-dirt yielded some particles of gold - one ten another six and a third four. The whole field was put together and handed in tin match box to the commissioner for the inspection of the Governor. On August 20 it was reported that there were between 150 and 200 men on the field. The ground extended along the creek for about three miles Tom Fletcher cleared £8 in a week. Cradles were in use It is on record that a cradle owned by Michel in which quicksilver was used to catch the gold proved ineffective, and was turned into two cradles of the ordinary kind. A few days later, a Crown bailiff, named Armstrong, and four mounted constables pitched their tent Anderson's Creek and permits to search, which preceded by a few days the gold licence, begun to be issued at 30/ a month. The first issue numbered 47, but it was known that many men kept out of the way of the commissioner, the title given to the representative of the Government on a gold field. The Andersons Creek goldfield was officially proclaimed on September 1 the first of many fields, Clunes Buninyong, Ballarat following on September 20.

The Government's Reward

A Select committee of the Legislative Council appointed to decide the claims made to the discovery of gold in Victoria submitted early in 1854 its report, which contained the following paragraphs: - "Mr Michel and his party have, in the opinion of your committee clearly established their claim to be held the first publishers of the discovery of a goldfield in the Colony of Victoria." . . . "To Mr Michel and his party as having, at considerable expense succeed in discovering and publishing an available goldfield, the sum of £1,000 should be given." In his history, "The Colony of Victoria." William Westgarth states that "The Customs records of the Colony show that during the month of August, 1851 18oz. of gold were exported. Those were the first fruits of the new vocation,

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and most probably the produce of the earliest of the goldfields." About £308,500,000 is the value, at £4 an ounce, of the gold obtained in Victoria since then.

Steps are being taken to erect a memorial in the vicinity of Michel's discovery, to be unveiled during the Centenary celebrations.