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## HO45 - Sanger Grave



Sanger Grave



Travelling to the Rushes'  
(Illustrated London News)



'Victorian Gold Fields 1852-53: Unlucky Digger That Never Returned', ST Gill

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### Location

1286-1292 Calder Highway (Reserve east of the railway line). DIGGERS REST, MELTON SHIRE

### Municipality

MELTON CITY

### Level of significance

Included in Heritage Overlay

### Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO45

### Heritage Listing

Melton City

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### Statement of Significance

Last updated on -

The JA Sanger grave at 1286-1292 Calder Highway Diggers Rest is of heritage significance as a rare, possibly unique, monument to the the goldrush travellers who walked to the Mount Alexander and other central Victorian goldfields in the great rushes of the early 1850s. Sanger and his mate were killed when the tilt dray under which they were sleeping tipped onto them when its back prop was displaced, possibly by horses (or perhaps thieves) pulling at feed in the dray, or else by intoxicated revellers as a prank. In c.1992 the grave, threatened with

destruction, was relocated to a park beside the former Highway in Diggers Rest. The brick monument now contains the cremated ashes of Sanger, and a reconstruction of the badly weathered original headstone. It is a rare and important place, indicative of the many burials that were carried out with minimal formality and outside reserved cemeteries in the colony's frontier days.

The JA Sanger grave, at 1286-1292 Calder Highway, Diggers Rest, is historically significant at a LOCAL level (AHC A4, B2). It is associated with one of the most dazzling goldrushes in world history, and with Australia's largest goldrush. The throng pushing up Mount Alexander Road in the early 1850s was of historic magnitude, and faced hardships and dangers of sometimes epic proportions. The trip up to the diggings was an integral and distinctive part of the goldrush phenomenon, and memorable one to the diggers. Most diggers, like Sanger, travelled the road on foot, camping out and in poor weather sleeping under drays.

This may be the only marked grave surviving to testify to those who fell by the wayside on the Mount Alexander Road in the early 1850s. While many died on the journey as a result of mishap, sickness and murder, and were buried beside the road, few headstones appear to have been erected, and none are known to survive.

The grave also constitutes evidence of the considerable American presence on and contribution to the Victorian goldfields, as well as to the international dimension of the goldrush phenomenon. The Americans were one of the many 'foreign' (non-British) minorities on the goldfields. Reported visits to the grave by American servicemen during the Second World War demonstrates its significance as a *de facto* memorial to the Americans in the goldrushes.

The history of the grave, including its possible association with the name of the township of Diggers Rest, has been a subject of interest for Victorians over many years, as evidenced by articles and debates in major metropolitan newspapers during the 1930s and 40s. The relative proximity of the Diggers Rest Hotel (the more likely origin of the township name) to the grave is historically significant, as the bodies of the diggers were probably taken to the hotel after the accident.

The JA Sanger grave at 1286-1292 Calder Highway, Diggers Rest, is socially significant at a LOCAL level (AHC G1), as evident in the local community's maintenance of the grave, and careful relocation of it to an accessible and prominent location in the township.

Heritage Study/Consultant	Melton - Shire of Melton Heritage Study phase 2, David Maloney, David Rowe, Pamela Jellie, Sera Jane Peters, 2007;
Construction dates	1856,
Other Names	1286-1292 Calder Highway, Diggers Rest (Reserve east of the railway line).,
Hermes Number	30031
Property Number	

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## Physical Description 1

### Physical Description -

The reconstructed headstone is a small pointed-arch shaped stone headstone which is inscribed simply: 'JA Sanger, Woodstock, USA, May 12th 1855, aged 24 years.'

It is currently situated in a reserve on the south side of the old Calder Highway, between the Diggers Rest Hotel, and the Diggers Rest Railway Station. It is embedded into a cream brick wall, set on a concrete base. The grave was relocated from a nearby location, approximately 150-200 metres up a hill on the north side of the Calder

Highway, towards the Diggers Rest Hotel. It is said to have been one of nine graves in that particular location. However there has always been a question as to which one of these nine graves was actually that of Sanger.

The reserve also contains a monument to Harry Houdini's first powered flight in Australia.

## **Integrity**

Integrity - Remains relocated; Headstone replicated; Context altered.

## **Physical Conditions**

Physical Condition - Good

## **Historical Australian Themes**

Melton Historical Themes: 'Transport'; 'Community'.

*This place/object may be included in the Victorian Heritage Register pursuant to the Heritage Act 2017. Check the Victorian Heritage Database, selecting 'Heritage Victoria' as the place source.*

*For further details about Heritage Overlay places, contact the relevant local council or go to Planning Schemes Online <http://planningschemes.dpcd.vic.gov.au/>*