

THE HOUSE THAT RICHARD BUILT... Richard Schlesinger (1833 – 1896)

Before this severe brick church stood tall on Northcote Hill (1927), there was a much earlier grand dwelling. Long regarded as Rucker's Folly/Mansion, controversy continues over whether William Rucker actually built the house.

Richard Schlesinger arrived in 1847, describing himself as an *experienced architect*. One of his co-passengers was R Goldsborough (of Goldsborough Mort & Co, an Australian agricultural business founded in 1888). Soon Schlesinger was exporting sheep to Hobart Town. That same year, 1851, he married Eliza Batchelor and by 1855 had two children born at Merri Creek/Northcote. Other children followed after they left Northcote.

In 1854 Schlesinger bought the Northcote Arms Hotel and, at the same time, acquired land on top of Rucker's Hill.

The hotel was located near the corner of Heidelberg Rd and High St. It was built of bluestone with 15 rooms, two cellars, stabling, bullock yards and gardens. By end of May the next year it was being touted as *Northcote Arms Family Hotel with a Grand Dress Ball – tickets 10 shillings*.



Church of the Epiphany, Northcote
photo John Maidment, 2009

Sales by Auction.
TUESDAY, 20th MAY.
At the Hall of Commerce.
**Absolute Sale of Suburban Residence,
Licensed Hotel, Land, and Town Dwelling-
House in King-street.**
W. PHILPOTT is instructed by the order of Mr. R. Schlesinger to sell by public auction, at the Public Sales Room, Hall of Commerce, on Tuesday, 20th May, at twelve o'clock precisely,
The following valuable properties—
Northcote Villa,
Situate on the summit of Rucker's-hill, at Northcote, Merri Creek, commanding a most noble and expansive view of the adjacent beautifully-wooded country, and of the shipping and harbor of Hobson's Bay.
The villa was erected by the owner, an experienced architect, with great care and judgment—is built of bluestone, both inside and outside—and is finished throughout with cedar; containing drawing-room 30 x 16, and other rooms in proportion.
Northcote Arms Hotel.
This licensed house is situate near the junction of the Heidelberg and Plenty roads, in the township of Northcote. The position, and a leading thoroughfare, is most advantageous, and since
The Opening of the Quarries the weekly receipts have been very considerably and permanently increased.
The house is built entirely of bluestone, both inside and outside walls, and finished thoroughly with cedar and Spanish mahogany, all the appliances being most complete for a first-rate trade. The centre, back, and sides of each fireplace are constructed of cut bluestone. The roof consists of teak rafters covered with slates, and the house is built on a plan that by an expenditure of £20 will permit of its being converted into
Three commodious Dwelling-Houses.
The hotel contains in all 18 apartments, several of which are exceedingly spacious. In addition there are wine cellars, provision cellars, detached kitchen, and servants' rooms, eight-stall stable, coach-house, fowl-house, all built of bluestone, and securely surrounded by a lofty wall of the same durable material.
Land on Rucker's-hill, Plenty-road.
Frontage, 625 feet to the Plenty-road, by a depth of 284 feet to Clarke-street.
This land is immediately opposite the Northcote Villa, and affords a fine site for a good country residence.
The situation commands a magnificent view of Hobson's Bay and the surrounding country.
Distance from Post Office, three miles.
House No. 88 King-street, being a commodious six-roomed well-built brick house. Frontage, 24 feet 3 inches, by a depth of 70 feet, with a metalled right-of-way, 16 feet wide in the rear.
Terms at Sale. 1990

As an architect Schlesinger had grand plans for his hill top allotment. He 'erected a magnificent mansion' in early 1855:

Northcote Villa – Plenty Rd (High St) frontage 115', depth of 150' to Bayview Terrace. Outside walls bluestone, interior cedar. Fireplaces fitted with marble mantelpieces and register grates, kitchen is provided with splendid range, closets, safe etc. 6 large apartments: inc drawing room 28' 10" x 16'. Balcony views of Hobsons Bay, Williamstown and surrounding country.

It seems that Schlesinger saw Northcote Villa as an investment – within a few months he was listing both the hotel, villa and four acres land opposite for sale. In 1857 John Morris takes ownership (?), though Schlesinger often leases it (in 1861 the property was still referred to as Schlesinger's so it is possible that Schlesinger owned it for quite some time). Morris called it *Sunnyside* (photo next page). Later re-named *The Alpines*, the house was demolished and the brick church built.

Schlesinger, however still had some connection with Northcote for some time, as there is a letter 1884 stating that he had no issues with Northcote council *cutting down the hill* (for the cable tram viaduct).

In March 1856 Richard Schlesinger is running a cartage business based at Flinders St, Melbourne (same street as John Morris), with dray deliveries to Ballarat with merchandise for the gold diggings. The business was good, wanting "American Wagons, horses and bullock teams".

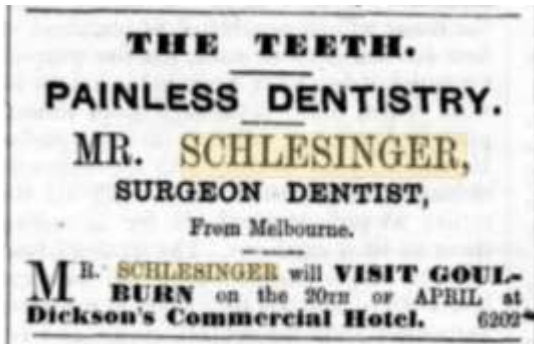
By 1860 Schlesinger began a long association with gold mines. Possibly his first is the Victorian Gold Mine. Later he was either the manager or secretary for a number of gold mines across Victoria: New Chum Mining Co, Beehive, Catherine River Quartz Mining, Crushing & Drainage Co, Grand Junction, Marriner's Reef (the deepest mine in 1866), Blue Jacket Quartz Mining Co and various mining leases.

Argus 1856 advertisement for sale of Schlesinger's Northcote properties

Schlesinger's interests rewarded him well. By 1870 he was living in the large 'Norwood House', Alfred Square, Esplanade, St Kilda. Well respected, he has been elected Life Governor of the Benevolent Asylum and soon he is Provost at Christ Church, St Kilda.

In 1896 Richard Schlesinger leaves a substantial estate of £4400 in personal property and £1100 in real estate property to his wife Eliza.

His children were a mixture of success and tragedy. Daughter – Carolina Louisa Eugenie married Henry Provost with great ceremony at Christ Church and they move to NSW. Some ten years later, tragically Provost commits suicide and Schlesinger rushes to his daughter's aid.



Son – Richard Emil, who is likely to be twin of Carolina (both were born in Collingwood).

Richard graduates in Edinburgh in 1879 and practices as a Dentist/Surgeon, though he sells the practice and then manages a private maternity nursing home in St Kilda – where his father, aged 66 years, will end his days – possibly because of being heart-broken over his daughter's husband tragic death.

Trivia: barely two years after Richard Schlesinger's marriage in 1851, his brother Nicholas Schlesinger marries Harriet Batchelor – sister of Eliza Batchelor.

Ferdinand Schlesinger, another sibling, becomes a land dealer – Bagley Bros & Schlesinger.

P Michell, 2019

Sunnyside c1926

