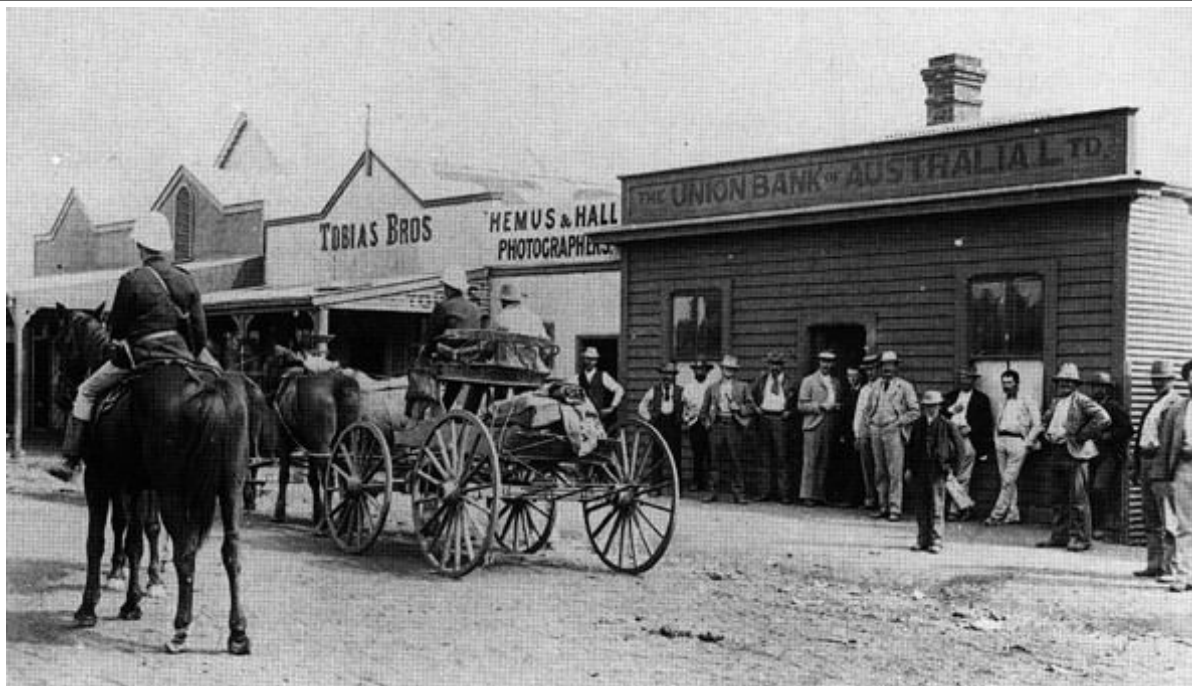


Gold escort leaving Coolgardie, c1895



Description

This is a black-and-white photograph of a gold escort in the main street of Coolgardie in about 1895. A four-wheeled horse-drawn buggy in the foreground carries luggage, presumably including boxes containing gold in the back. Two troopers, one on horseback and one seated beside the driver, form an escort, carrying firearms to protect the gold from thieves. An obscured rider may also be part of the escort. In the background can be seen several businesses, including a bank, and a small crowd of onlookers watching the departure. The street is wide and unpaved. The photograph measures 20.3 cm x 14.7cm.

Educational value

- This asset shows gold found in the Coolgardie gold fields being taken by road to the railhead - until the railway to Coolgardie was completed in 1896 the first part of the gold's journey to Perth was by road; when the first discoveries were made the railhead was at Doodlakine, approximately 250 km from Perth; in 1894 the railway reached Southern Cross.
- It was taken in Bayley Street, the main street in Coolgardie - the street was named for Arthur Bayley who, with William Ford, discovered gold in the area in September 1892, sparking Western Australia's greatest gold rush; Bayley Street is exceptionally wide in order to accommodate turning camel trains.
- It shows a gold escort attracting the interest of the passers-by - the authorities preferred gold escorts not to attract attention, requesting consignees of gold not to publicise the amount sent under escort (thousands of ounces at a time - 1,000 oz is about 28.5 kg); however, the waterless countryside probably acted as more of a deterrent to any would-be robbers than the constables' rifles.
- It suggests that robberies needed to be guarded against with the force of arms - while no-one condoned one prospector stealing gold from another, the theft of company-mined gold was viewed more favourably, at least by miners; a special



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- gold-stealing detection unit established in 1907 operates to this day.
- It was taken outside one of the many privately owned banks that sprang up within a short time on the rich Coolgardie gold fields, along with stock exchanges, hotels and jewellers' shops - the escort is probably leaving from outside the Union Bank, because banks were the biggest buyers of gold, paying cash to individual miners; if possible, alluvial miners would send their gold with trusted friends or partners travelling by ship to Melbourne, as the Melbourne Mint paid 8 shillings more per ounce than they could get in WA.
 - It shows the studio of Hemus and Hall, photographers who recorded much of Coolgardie's pioneering days and who probably took this photograph - successful miners were often keen to have their status recognised in formal studio portraits, and these businesses often did very well on the gold fields.
 - It includes the shop of Coolgardie storekeepers Thomas and Ernest Tobias - the two men backed a prospecting expedition that found gold at Mount Leonora; the resulting mine was named the 'Sons of Gwalia' in honour of their Welsh background; a manager of this mine by the name of Herbert Hoover went on to become the president of the USA.
 - It depicts Coolgardie, a town that grew rapidly following the discovery of gold in there in September 1892 - by the time this photograph was taken it had grown from virgin bush to a town with a population of about 5,000; the centre for mining operations, it was also the centre to which a potential 20,000 people would retreat during typhoid epidemics or times of water shortage to take advantage of the established water supplies, such as the government bore, and the medical facilities, such as the government hospital.

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