



Hallenstein, Bendix 1835 - 1905  
Merchant, politician, manufacturer

Bendix Hallenstein was born in Brunswick, Germany, probably on 24 January 1835. He was the son of Helena Michaelis and her husband, Reuben Hallenstein, who owned a shoddy-mill in Lügde which manufactured woollen cloth from refuse rags. Bendix was the youngest of three sons in this Jewish family.

At the age of 17 Bendix Hallenstein went to Manchester, England, where he learned English and business methods from his mother's brother who operated a shipping office. Around 1857 he followed his brothers, Isaac and Michaelis, to the Victorian goldfields in Australia where they had a store at Daylesford. Mary Mountain, who had gone to Australia to visit a seafaring brother, was employed by the Hallensteins as a housekeeper. All three brothers wanted to marry the capable and attractive young woman. She chose Bendix and returned to her English home for the wedding. The couple were married in

the Anglican parish church at Alford, Lincolnshire, on 14 February 1861. They were to have four daughters: Sara Elizabeth, who married her cousin Willi Fels; Emily, who married Isidore de Beer; Henrietta, who married James Francis Hyams; and Agnes Fawcett, who married Siegfried Brasch. These couples became the nucleus of a large and important Jewish extended family.

In 1863 Hallenstein moved to New Zealand and opened a store in Invercargill, shifting the following year to Queenstown where he sold groceries, wines and spirits, drapery and ironmongery. His genial nature made him popular and his inventive attitude made him prosperous. He opened stores in Cromwell, Arrowtown and Lawrence and also acted as agent for woolgrowers, selling wool in Dunedin, Melbourne and London. With a partner, J. W. Robertson, he opened Otago's first inland flour mill in 1867 at Kawarau Falls.

About the same time he began farming at Speargrass Flat, growing wheat and oats and planting fruit trees. He built a large homestead and called the property Thurlby Domain after his wife's family home.

By this time Hallenstein had entered public life. His partner, Robertson, was the first mayor of Queenstown and Hallenstein followed from 1869 to 1872. His mayoralty was marked by the planting of many trees, the building of bridges across the Kawarau and Shotover rivers, and the building of a new stone courthouse and gaol. He represented The Lakes in the Otago Provincial Council from 1872 to 1875 and was a member of the House of Representatives from 1872 to 1873. For many years he was a justice of the peace, and from 1893 until his death he served as German consul in Dunedin.

Difficulty in obtaining men's clothing for his stores persuaded Hallenstein to enter the garment industry. In 1873 he established the New Zealand Clothing Factory in Dunedin, the country's first such venture. He ran into financial difficulties which were resolved by selling the factory to the National Fire and Marine Insurance Company and leasing it back from them. Next, to ensure a wider market for his products, he opened a retail store in Dunedin's Octagon 'to sell a single garment at wholesale price.' By the turn of the century there were 34 Hallensteins' shops throughout the country.

Bendix Hallenstein moved to Dunedin and built a handsome home at the corner of London Street and Victoria Street (Haddon Place) on the slopes above the business area. He quickly became a leading figure in commercial circles. He founded the Drapery and General Importing Company (DIC) retail chain in 1884, initially as a co-operative store. He became a director of Kempthorne, Prosser and Company's New Zealand Drug Company, the National Fire and Marine Insurance Company and the Westport Coal Company.

Hallenstein was noted for his generosity to those in need and was an enlightened employer. In 1880 he established a fund which provided free medicine for his employees until the introduction of social security in 1938. During the sweating agitation of the late 1880s he was a supporter of the efforts of the Reverend Rutherford Waddell to improve the conditions of workers in industry, and he supported the trade union movement. In June 1889 he argued in favour of the formation of a tailoresses' union, declaring that his company 'would prefer to abandon our business rather than carry it on, if it can only be remunerative by starvation wages. I, for one, would not feel happy to live on the misery of others.' In 1890 he told a Chamber of Commerce conference that unions could benefit employers as well as employees.

A leader of the Jewish community, Hallenstein had his daughters instructed in his faith,

but Mary Hallenstein remained an Anglican and the girls were familiar with the two sets of creeds and observances. They were tutored in French and Hebrew, encouraged to read widely and were taken to Europe to further their education. Agnes graduated MA from the University of New Zealand in 1893.

An accident with a horse left Bendix Hallenstein lame from his early 30s and he walked with a stick and suffered pain for the rest of his life. He was, nevertheless, a happy and outgoing person who was widely liked and respected. He and his brothers retained close business and personal relations throughout their lives and Bendix's immediate family relationships were happy. He was ahead of his time in the treatment of his staff and he demonstrated foresight when, after visiting Japan in 1902, he publicly prophesied that country's rise as an industrial power.

For the last 18 months of his life Hallenstein was virtually an invalid. On 6 January 1905, after suffering a stroke, he died at his London Street home survived by his wife, who died in 1907, and three of his daughters. He was buried with Jewish ritual in Dunedin's Southern cemetery. The Otago Witness commented that 'The helping hand of the deceased gentleman will be sorely missed by the poor of all creeds.'