

EUREKA
EDUCATION

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THE
EUREKA
REBELLION

EUREKA
CENTRE
BALLARAT

ART GALLERY
OF BALLARAT



THE EUREKA REBELLION

image p. 23:
Charles A Doudiet
Eureka riot 17th October (1854) 1854
watercolour on paper
16.8 x 23.7 cm
Purchased with the assistance of many donors, 1996. Principal Donors: Victorian Government through the Community Support Fund, Pam Davies, Eureka Stockade Memorial Committee of Management, Blair Ritchie, Rotary Club of Ballarat South, Wendouree Charitable Fund; Major Donors: Commercial Union Assurance Co., Janet Cowles, Bob & Emma House, Rex Irwin Art Dealer, Mabs Taylor, Peter Tobin, Voi & John Williams: plus 80 donors from the community. Collection of the Art Gallery of Ballarat

Ellen Young A letter to the Editor, The Ballarat Times. Saturday, 11 November 1854, quoted in Clare Wright, *The Forgotten Rebels of Eureka*, Text Publishing, Melbourne, 2013, p.170

PROTESTS ON THE GOLDFIELDS

Diggers on various Victorian goldfields protested against the licence fee, seeking its removal or reduction. In the Red Ribbon Movement of 1853, diggers on the Bendigo and Castlemaine goldfields petitioned Lieutenant-Governor La Trobe to reduce the licence fee.

A NEW GOVERNOR

Sir Charles Hotham was appointed Lieutenant-Governor of Victoria in 1853. Although he was popular at first, Hotham angered the miners by ordering that licence hunts be carried out twice a week, instead of two or three times a month. This harsh decision is one of the main reasons the diggers in Ballarat decided to stand up to the goldfields administration.

‘Oh, Sir Charles we had better hopes of you! We the people demand cheap land, just magistrates, to be represented in the Legislative Council, in fact treated as the free subjects of a great nation.’

BENTLEY’S HOTEL

When miner James Scobie was murdered in October 1854, publican William Bentley of the Eureka Hotel was thought to be involved. A meeting was held near the hotel but what started as a peaceful protest quickly turned into a riot. The crowd attacked the hotel and it was looted and burned to the ground.

BALLARAT REFORM LEAGUE

In November 1854, a group of diggers and storekeepers formed the Ballarat Reform League to call for reforms. They adopted a Charter at a public meeting. The League hoped to pressure Hotham into abolishing the licence system and granting a range of democratic rights, including male suffrage (the vote) and full and fair representation in the government.

MONSTER MEETING

The Ballarat Reform League organised huge public gatherings to push for political and social reform. The movement quickly changed as miners became angrier – at a ‘monster meeting’ on Bakery Hill on 29 November 1854, more than 10,000 people responded to the rallying cry and some of the miners burnt their licences in protest.

SWEARING AN OATH

On 30 November the police, ignoring the mood on the goldfields, set out on a provocative licence hunt known as a 'Digger hunt'. The enraged diggers gathered again on Bakery Hill, appointing a young Irishman, Peter Lalor, as their leader.

'With a burning feeling of an injured man I mounted the stump and proclaimed liberty'

Peter Lalor, 'To the Colonists of Victoria', *The Argus*, 10 April 1855

At Bakery Hill, the diggers assembled beneath the blue and white flag depicting the Southern Cross to swear this oath:

'We swear by the Southern Cross to stand truly by each other and fight to defend our rights and liberties.'

Peter Lalor, Bakery Hill, 29 November 1854, quoted in Raffaello Carboni, *The Eureka Stockade*, 1855

THE STOCKADE

After taking the oath, a group marched to the Eureka Lead where they hastily built a stockade, or wooden fort, overlooking the Melbourne road. They armed themselves with an assortment of weapons and prepared to stand their ground against the authorities. The stockade was built around some of the tents on the diggings and those inside included women and children.

THE BATTLE

The government was determined to crush the diggers' resistance. Knowing that there were reduced numbers of diggers in the stockade on the morning of Sunday 3 December, 300 Government soldiers and police attacked at dawn. Government troops attacked dying men with bayonets. Tents both inside and outside the stockade were set on fire to drive fugitives out into the open. The well-armed soldiers and police quickly overcame the 150 diggers, killing more than 20 of them. Some reports state that a woman and a child were also killed in the battle. A number of men on the government side were also killed or wounded. More than 120 diggers were arrested. The timing of the attack outraged the community because the troopers attacked the stockade at dawn on a Sunday – the Christian day of worship.

AFTER THE BATTLE

After the battle some of the surviving miners, including Peter Lalor, managed to escape and hide from the authorities but 13 men captured and charged with treason. However, the Eureka trials – the only treason trials in Australian history – did not proceed as the authorities planned. The public supported the diggers and rather than backing the government, the juries sided with the accused. All 13 men were acquitted.

Who do you think was responsible for the battle at Eureka? The miners or the government?

‘Poor Governor Hotham! ... Why did you disregard our memorials and entreaties ... for justice and protection against your unjust stewards here, until the people, sickened by hope deferred, and maddened by continued and increased acts of oppression, were driven to take up arms in self-defence?’

THE BIRTHPLACE OF AUSTRALIAN DEMOCRACY?

Eureka and its significance to Australian history continue to be debated. Some claim that the reforms granted to the diggers would have been introduced regardless of the Eureka conflict. Others assert that events in Ballarat accelerated discussion of the social and political issues and the achievement of parliamentary representation for the citizens of Victoria.

‘It is the inalienable right of every citizen to have a voice in making the laws he is called upon to obey.’

Clara Seekamp, *The Ballarat Times*,
1 January 1855

Ballarat Reform League Charter, 1854

Activity 1

English 5–9

Literacy

You are a miner working on the Eureka Lead in November–December 1854. Write a letter to your parents or a friend describing life on the diggings and the events associated with the Eureka Rebellion.

Activity 2

History 8–10

Historical skills

Compare the two statements below:

‘We swear by the Southern Cross to stand truly by each other and fight to defend our rights and liberties.’

Diggers’ oath, 1854

‘From this time forward, I pledge my loyalty to Australia and its people, whose democratic beliefs I share, whose rights and liberties I respect, and whose laws I will uphold and obey.’

Australian Citizenship Pledge, 1948

Analyse the similarities and differences between the two statements (using a Venn diagram or table).

Write a short response to the statement:

The Australian Citizenship Pledge is a modern version of the diggers oath and places importance on the same values.

OR

What do you think is important for Australian citizens to agree to? Write a new oath and then explain what you have chosen to include and/or leave out.

DISCUSSION TOPICS

1. What was the role of the Eureka Rebellion in the development of Australian democracy?
2. What were the demands of the Ballarat Reform League?

Discuss the roles, attitudes and actions taken by some of the individuals involved in the Eureka story including Peter Lalor, Governor Hotham, John Humffray, Raffaello Carboni, and Clara Seekamp.

BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

Visit the Eureka Centre and participate in the Eureka! or Down with Despotism program.

Visit the Art Gallery of Ballarat and participate in the Hall of Debate program.

ACTIVITIES

THE EUREKA REBELLION

Pre-visit

Complete Activity 1

Post-visit

Use what you learnt about the meaning of democracy to compare the two statements listed in Activity 2. Have a class discussion about the similarities and differences.

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EUREKA EDUCATION

W eurekacentreballarat.com.au

E eurekaeducation@ballarat.vic.gov.au

T 03 5333 0308

ART GALLERY OF BALLARAT EDUCATION

W artgalleryofballarat.com.au

E artgalleryeducation@ballarat.vic.gov.au

T 03 5320 5782