

5th December 1854

The Ballarat Times

REBELLION AT EUREKA!

At 3 am on Sunday 3rd December, violent bloodshed occurred on Victorian soil. Almost 300 musket wielding soldiers attacked the rough stockade, built by diggers, near the Eureka Lead. Although the diggers were tough, they were outnumbered, outgunned and unskilled fighters. Crazy soldiers and police thrust their bayonets into the dead and dying. The brutal assault lasted just 15 minutes, resulting in the death of at least 22 diggers and 6 soldiers.

Tensions on the goldfields had mounted long before the fateful event which took place on Sunday. Miners were disgruntled over the oppressive licence fee imposed on them to dig for gold. The licence fee had to be paid whether gold was found or not. Miners were constantly harassed during 'licence hunts'. They were forced to show proof of their licence or risk facing a fine, a beating or imprisonment.

The spark that detonated the rebellion came in October 1854, with the murder of Scottish miner, James Scobie at Bentley's Hotel. James Bentley, a hotel proprietor, was accused of the crime. He was declared innocent. The miners believed that a corrupt magistrate made the decision. A small group of miners decided to take justice into their own hands and burnt the hotel to the ground. They were arrested by police.



MINERS FIGHTING FOR THEIR RIGHTS AND LIBERTIES
AT EUREKA

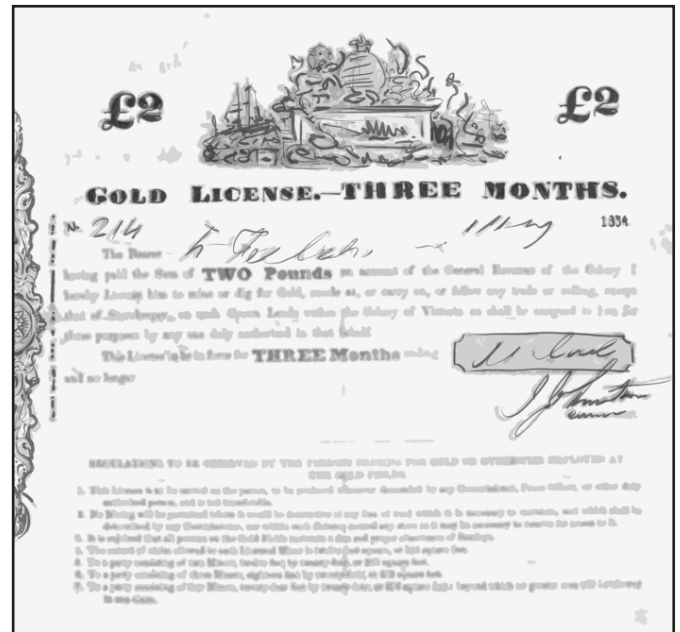
On the 11th of November, fed up with the unfair laws imposed by the government and aggrieved by the lack of political representation, 10,000 miners attended a meeting at Bakery Hill. At this meeting, the Ballarat Reform League was established. They drafted 'The Ballarat Reform League Charter' and demanded voting rights, better working conditions and the abolition of the licence fee.

On the 27th of November, the charter was presented to Governor Hotham and demands were made to release the three miners imprisoned for setting fire to Bentley's Hotel. Anger continued to grow as the colonial government refused to compromise and dismissed the miner's demands. Fearing a rebellion, the governor called for extra troops to support the soldiers and police already stationed at Ballarat.

By the 29th of November, tempers were flaring, and thousands of miners rallied yet again. A clergyman who witnessed the events said, “Ballarat is thrown into great excitement by a monster meeting of the diggers, convened for the purpose of protesting against the gold digging licences and their alleged grievances”. The Southern Cross flag was unveiled at the meeting, and many miners lined up to burn their licences under a flag that united them. This was an act of protest.

The next day, the soldiers and police decided to show force by initiating a massive licence hunt. As news of the chaos spread people marched towards Bakery Hill. The miners looked for a leader and from the crowd stepped Peter Lalor. All faith in the government was lost. The miners, under the leadership of Lalor, were ready to stand united and swore allegiance to the Southern Cross flag. They were determined to fight for their rights and liberties.

The miners proceeded to gather timber from nearby mineshafts and created a stockade. In the centre of the stockade, the Southern Cross flag was hoisted. By the time night had set in on the 2nd of December, many men left the stockade assuming the troops would not attack on a Sunday. Less than 200 miners were in the Stockade at the time of the attack. The battle was short as the miners were no match for the army troops. Despite resistance collapsing almost immediately, the troops continued to relentlessly attack.



MINER'S LICENCE

The government has dealt with the miner's grievances using unnecessary military force. They had many opportunities to address the issues presented but chose not to. As a result, the miners were driven to rebel against the vicious treatment they faced when all peaceful means of protest had failed. Will the miner's efforts to fight for their rights go unheard? Or will the government finally respond?



MINERS WERE FATALLY INJURED AT EUREKA