

The Eureka Uprising

Lesson Focus: *You will learn about the Eureka Stockade and its effects on the diggers.*

Keywords: *elements, amenities, licence, intrusion, rebellion, allegiance, abolish*

Dearest Mother,

I hope this letter finds you well and coping since the passing of Father. You must ensure that you look after yourself, eating properly, keeping warm and staying away from any illness.

Working on the goldfields here at Ballarat is difficult. The dirt is hard, there is hardly any water and the weather is brutal. More and more people arrive here every day to seek their fortune. The canvas city grows and grows and is becoming more and more crowded. It is called a canvas city, because most people live in canvas tents. The tents do not really protect us from the elements, but it is not often we are there. We spend long hours in the fields seeking our fortune and only go to the tents to sleep.

I have had some success in my search for gold but not enough to consider that I have made my fortune.

The government of our colony decided to charge each miner 30 shillings every month to purchase a licence to dig for gold. As you can imagine, this is a lot of money if we do not actually find any gold. It is already difficult enough to support ourselves. The government said they needed the money to build more roads, transport water and build amenities for the growing population.

The police were given the right to ask to see our licences whenever they felt, we resented this intrusion and lack of trust. Those diggers without a licence usually hid during the inspections—some were unsuccessful and got caught, copping a fine of £5 for not having a licence.

We tried to meet with Governor Hotham to tell him what we thought of the licence. Because we were miners, we had no say in government, the politicians did not feel that what we had to say was of any value to them or the community. The governor did not listen to us on our visit and sent more troops to the fields for licence inspections. We saw red! We couldn't believe the government could be so blind and narrow in its thinking.

We decided it was time to take action. I and several other men became the leaders of a rebellion against the government. Maybe they would listen then. We raised the flag of the Southern Cross and burnt our mining licences on 29 November at Bakery Hill. A group of men gathered and swore their allegiance to the Southern Cross and made a promise to fight for everyone's rights. After this we went to work building a stockade. We used logs, rocks, broken carts, rope and stakes—anything we could find. We gathered together as many miners (about 150 men) as we could to fight the soldiers. We were ready!

At about 4 a.m. on Sunday, 3 December 1854, 182 soldiers and 94 police officers stormed the stockade. The battle was a bloody and furious one which seemed to last forever, but in actual fact only lasted 15 minutes. When all was quiet and things had settled, we discovered we had lost about 30 miners and we had killed about six soldiers and police officers. What had we done? The leaders felt responsible for the deaths, but if life had to be lost to improve our situation, then so be it!

The government put out a warrant for the arrest of as many of the leaders as possible. I and twelve other men were taken to trial. Luckily for us, most of us were acquitted.

We felt that we had gained nothing from the battle, or so it seemed. Several months later, the government decided to abolish the licence fee and brought in a £1 per year Miner's Right fee. This also meant we had the right to vote. For the first time, we could have our say. We all feel we have come a long way.

I will try to write more regularly—the past year has been a very difficult one. Hopefully the situation on the goldfields will improve and I will soon find my fortune.

Faithfully your son,

Peter

Use the letter from Peter to his mother to answer these questions.

1. (a) Why do you think the leaders of the uprising were acquitted? _____

 - (b) Do you think they deserved to be acquitted? Why/Why not? _____

2. What did Peter mean by the following?
 - (a) 'We saw red!' _____

 - (b) 'What had we done?' _____

 - (c) 'We all feel we have come a long way.' _____



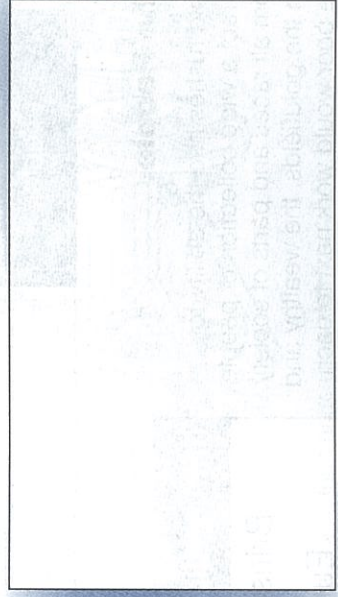
3. (a) What were the men trying to achieve by burning their licences? _____

- (b) What may have been the consequences of this action? _____

4. Do you think the battle between the miners and the soldiers and police was fair? Explain. _____

5. Explain what you think about 'The leaders felt responsible for the deaths, but if life had to be lost to improve our situation, then so be it!'. _____

6. Complete the design to show the flag of the Southern Cross. _____



Topics for Discussion/Debate

View a copy of a Miner's Licence. The conditions outlined on the licence were deemed unfair by the miners. Do you think they were fair or unfair? Discuss.

Additional Activities

1. Write a letter to a loved one in Britain about your experiences during the Eureka Uprising. Remember to share with them aspects of life on the goldfields.
2. Create a mural of the events of the Eureka Uprising. Use brief statements to explain the events and present to your class or school.

Search Engine Keywords

Eureka uprising; Eureka Stockade; Peter Lalor; Ballarat