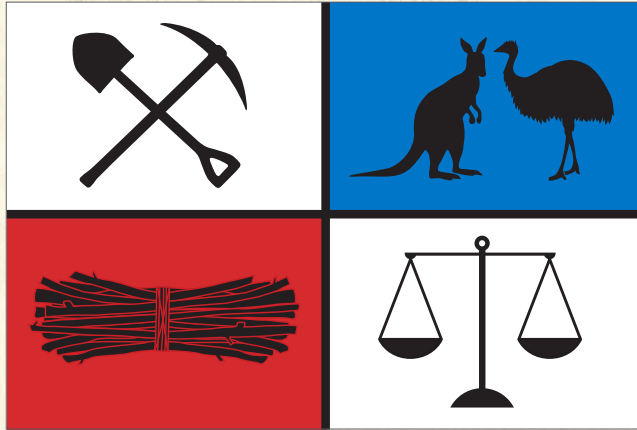


A FIRST STEP TO DEMOCRACY

The site of the 1851 Monster Meeting is listed in the Victorian Heritage Register in recognition that it was a first step in the movement to establish parliamentary democracy in Australia.

Monster Meeting Flag



Design created from historical sources by Robyn Annear and David Bannear

We fly the shovel and the pick for our honest labour
The emu and the kangaroo we fly for Australia
And if we stick together boys, and say not 'I, say 'Us'
We'll weigh the gold, and weigh our dreams
Upon the scales of justice.

Dave Maxwell & Jan 'Yarn' Wositzky

"Gather Round the Flag",
The Monster Meeting CD.



REMEMBER THE MONSTER MEETING

The Monster Meeting site is in Dja Dja Wurrung country in central Victoria near Chewton in the Castlemaine Diggings National Heritage Park, managed by Parks Victoria. The landscape of the gold rush can still be seen there.



Every year on December 15 people gather at the site to remember the Monster Meeting and celebrate the Diggers' contribution to Australian democracy.



Further information:

Monster Meeting Book & CD, Jan 'Yarn' Wositzky (Chewton Domain Society 2014)

www.monstermeeting.net www.chewton.net
www.heritage.vic.gov.au www.parks.vic.gov.au

Chewton Domain Society

PO Box 85, Chewton Victoria. February 2019



THE 1851 MONSTER MEETING OF DIGGERS AT FOREST CREEK

In December 1851, a Monster Meeting of 15,000 diggers at Forest Creek defied the government by peacefully refusing to pay more for their gold licences. They set in motion a democratic movement that ignited protests across the goldfields, led to the 1853 Bendigo Red Ribbon Movement and culminated a year later in bloodshed at the Eureka Stockade in Ballarat that finally ended the old order on the goldfields.

Eureka at Ballarat in 1854 had its beginnings in the Monster Meeting at Forest Creek in 1851.

Main image: The Great Meeting of Diggers 1851.
Drawn by D Tulloch. Engraved by T Ham.

NO STOPPING THE GOLDRUSH

In late 1851 thousands abandoned their jobs and homes in cities, towns and stations to rush to Forest Creek on the Mt Alexander goldfield.

It was the richest shallow alluvial goldfield ever discovered.

Governor La Trobe tried to stop the gold rush because he feared it would overturn the established social order. He introduced a gold miner's licence for 30 shillings per month to deter gold diggers. It was a lot of money to pay whether you found gold or not. But it still didn't slow the gold rush. So he announced that the licence would double to 60 shillings per month.

This caused immediate protests across the goldfields.

In Forest Creek notices urged Fellow Diggers to meet and agitate for justice and 3,000 gathered to protest and determine what they should do. They asked local Gold Commissioner Powlett to convene a general meeting of all miners to consider the proposed increase but he declined. Instead he rode to Melbourne to warn La Trobe of a potentially large and hostile gathering to oppose the increase.

So the diggers convened the meeting themselves.

WE WON'T PAY



Anonymous sketch of speakers from the day

In the late afternoon of Monday 15 December 1851, with their new flag flying, 15,000 diggers gathered peacefully and announced that they would not pay.

And their protest worked. La Trobe, fearing insurrection after being warned of the great meeting, revoked the proposed increase.

Read report of meeting written on-site in The Argus of 18 December 1851 @:
www.monstermeeting.net/diggersmeeting

THE DIGGERS

United in their refusal to pay, the diggers became the 'Diggers', a political force of men who understood that their strength lay in unity. And this became a connecting thread through the protests of the next three years.

The Diggers' triumph did not end conflict about the licence, but it had a major impact on subsequent events.

The Monster Meeting was Australia's first organised mass protest meeting. It began a pattern of popular protest orchestrated by leaders who made the link between the ambitions of those ordinary miners and the broader political context of the times.

In response La Trobe tried to increase government control of the goldfields with a stronger military presence, but to no avail. The Diggers' demands for an end to the licence system grew and spread.

Organised protests over the next three years saw the end of the licence system and the first steps to democracy with the introduction of some voting rights, more access to land and the end of the old order on the goldfields.