



EUREKA
EDUCATION

—
**THE
EUREKA
FLAG**

EUREKA
CENTRE
BALLARAT

ART GALLERY
OF BALLARAT

THE EUREKA FLAG

image, right & p. 29

unknown artist

The flag of the Southern Cross

(Eureka Flag) 1854

wool, cotton

Actual size: 260.0 x 324.0cm (irreg.)

Original size: 260.0 x 370.5 cm

Gift of the King family, 2001

Collection of the Art Gallery of Ballarat



The original Flag of the Southern Cross (The Eureka Flag) can be viewed at the Eureka Centre, on loan from the Art Gallery of Ballarat. It was made in 1854.

ORIGINS OF THE FLAG

It is not known who designed or made the flag. It is widely believed that it was designed by a Canadian miner, Henry Charles Ross (see Key figures) There are traditional stories which suggest that it may have been sewn by three women – Anne Withers, Anne Duke and Anastasia Hayes (see Women on the goldfields) but there are alternative claims that the claim was made by local tentmakers Edwards and Davis. Neither of these stories have been proven.

The flag was first raised at a Ballarat Reform League meeting at Bakery Hill on 29 November 1854. It was then moved to the Eureka Stockade where it was flown until torn down after the battle on 3 December, only five days later.

FLAG DESCRIPTION

The flag is 2.6 metres high and 4metres wide – more than double the size of a standard flag. The blue fabric is mostly cotton, while wool has been used for the white cross and the stars. The flag is made up of multiple panels of fabric that have been stitched together. It has been suggested that it was stitched together from pieces of petticoat however the fabric was likely clothing fabric from the roll. It features the symbol of the Southern Cross.



Charles A Doudiet
Swearing allegiance to the 'Southern Cross' 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

THE SOUTHERN CROSS

The Southern Cross is a prominent constellation of stars in Australian skies and is only visible in the Southern Hemisphere. It is featured on the Australian, New Zealand and Brazilian flags, and many others, especially those of Pacific Island nations. Most of the arrivals during the gold rush were from the Northern Hemisphere: Europe, North America and Asia. They had not seen this constellation before – it was a sign to them that they were in a new place. For the Eureka rebels, it became a symbol of unity for people living together in this new society.

'(I call) on my fellow-diggers, irrespective of nationality, religion and colour, to salute the Southern Cross as the refuge for all the oppressed from all countries on earth.'

Raffaello Carboni in
'The Eureka Stockade' 1855

THE CONDITION OF THE FLAG

Only 40% of the flag survives. In 1854, as soon as the battle was over, trooper John King tore down the flag and many soldiers cut away pieces to keep as a memento of the battle. In the 1890s, the King family offered the flag to the Melbourne Public Library, now State Library of Victoria, but the library decided not to take it because it could not be proven to be authentic.

THE
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ArtLab conservators working on the Eureka Flag conservation, 2011. Photo, ArtLab

Founder of the Art Gallery of Ballarat James Oddie asked the King family for the flag because of its importance to the history of Ballarat. The King family lent the flag to the Gallery gifting it in 2001. In a practice no longer followed, during the early years at the Gallery, staff occasionally cut pieces off to give as souvenirs to interested people.

CONSERVATION WORK

In 1973 the flag was washed and repaired by a local seamstress, Val D'Angri. She later discovered that she was a descendant of Anastasia Withers, one of the three women thought to have made the flag.

In 2011 the flag was transported to Artlab, a professional conservation laboratory in Adelaide. During the six months it spent there, conservators analysed the cloth it was made from, undertook repairs and mounted it onto a special backing board. The flag is stitched onto this backing by tiny synthetic threads which are not visible. It is displayed on this board to show how large the flag was and how much of it is missing.

PROTECTING THE FLAG

The flag is currently kept under careful conditions to ensure it is protected. These measures include being encased to regulate temperature and humidity and keep out insects and other pests. It is kept in a secure fireproof room under dim lights that turn off when the room is empty, as constant light can damage the fabric. That is also why flash is not allowed when taking photographs.

Ash Keating *EurEco Revolution* 2009. Flag flying over the Ballarat Trades Hall building.
Courtesy of the artist



THE EUREKA FLAG TODAY

Today the Eureka Flag still holds meaning to many Australians as a symbol of defiance in the face of injustice, a collective action to right wrongs and as a sign of democratic social inclusion. The appropriation of the Eureka Flag by groups representing divergent ideologies has a long history. While the flag has a strong association with the Trade Union movement, in recent times it has also been adopted as an expression of nationalist ideology.

Many contemporary artists have used the flag to focus on issues facing society. In Ash Keating's Euroeco,(2011) the flag background is no longer blue but green. Keating has used the symbol of the flag to raise questions about the future of the environment. In Eureconciliation Flag, (2003) Marc De Jong has also used the flag to raise an important issue. By using the colours of the Aboriginal flag de Jong asks viewers to think about First Nations people and the topic of reconciliation.

ACTIVITIES

EUREKA FLAG ACTIVITIES

Activity 1

Mathematics 5–6

Measurement and Geography

Use tape on the floor to lay out a rectangle that is the same size as the Eureka Flag (2.6 metres high and 4 metres wide).

Questions to explore:

- How many people can stand outside the rectangle? How many people can you fit inside the rectangle?
- What other shapes can you make using the same length of tape? Are these bigger or smaller than the rectangle?
- Use informal measurements to calculate the perimeter of the rectangle (arm length, feet, hands, etc.). Make a graph comparing the measurements. Which unit did you use the most of? Which did you use the least of? Why do you think they are all different?
- Use familiar measurements to calculate the area of the flag. Use different methods (e.g. length \times width, length + width length \times 2). Which was the quickest way to work out the area?

Activity 2

Civics and Citizenship 3–7

The images/symbols and colour used on a flag usually have specific meanings. Choose a flag other than the Australian National Flag, and research what the flag represents.

Activity 3

Visual Arts 5–9

There are many theories about who designed and made the Eureka Flag. A popular view is that three women joined together to make the Eureka Flag. As a whole class or small group collaborate and create a flag of your own design.

DISCUSSION TOPICS

1. What was the significance of design and size of the Eureka flag to the miners?
2. Investigate the reason why the Eureka Flag was first flown at Bakery Hill?
3. How do you think the flag was seen by supporters of the government?

BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

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

Pre-visit

Complete Activity 2

Post-visit

Complete Activity 3, if you completed your own flag design then make a class flag that represents your school. What are some of the symbols you learnt about that you could use? Do you have school colours? What do they mean?

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