The wild residents of Blackwattle Swamp

This is a description of a NSW Legislative Council election in 1843. It was written by the manager of the ***Sydney Morning Herald***, FG Brewer.

The **nomination** took place on Tuesday, June 13th at the **hustings** in front of the old Star Hotel. Mr Wentworth, Mr Bland and Captain O'Connell were three of the **candidates** standing for election. Each had his own colours. Those of Wentworth and Bland were blue, and O'Connell's were green.

Separate processions escorted each candidate to the hustings. However, the processions all reached Macquarie Place at the same time and a fierce struggle took place. The O'Connellites took over the area occupied by the **returning officer** and his staff so the Wentworth and Bland group stormed the platform. Many people were hurled to the ground.

It was so noisy that orderly speaking was impossible. Mr Cooper spoke loudly to the mob and stated his claims to election. His supporters were the wild residents of Blackwattle Swamp. They attacked anybody who had different opinions so Cooper was able to talk away for some time without interruption.

Election day finally arrived. The **polling** started at nine o'clock on June 15th, and went fairly well for the first two hours. About twelve o'clock, a mob of some 500 O'Connellites went to the **polling booth** in Gipps Ward on Flagstaff Hill, tore down the colours of Wentworth and Bland, flattened their booth and made a furious attack on their supporters, who ran away in all directions.

The polling booth was surrounded. For a while, the mob stopped anybody entering except people who wanted to vote for O'Connell. They attacked Mr John Jones, the owner of some whaling ships. He ran down to his wharf in Windmill Street and returned with a number of sailors, armed with **whale lances**. Luckily the mob had gone to another place, and the whalers were met by a unit of the mounted police, who chased them back to their ships and disarmed them.

Meanwhile, there was such a **riot** on Flagstaff Hill that the returning officer decided to put off the poll until the following morning. The same mob then went to other polling places. It stopped outside the residence and auction rooms of Mr Samuel Lyons, who was a strong supporter of Wentworth and Bland. Large stones were hurled through the plate-glass windows of the auction rooms and smaller ones were used on the windows of the first and second floors.

The mob proceeded to Hyde Park. They chased Captain Innes, one of the police magistrates but he escaped by jumping his horse over a fence. Then there was a short battle with fists against friends of the popular candidates. The rioters were driven from the park but returned with fence palings they tore from some houses in Elizabeth Street. They attacked again until some mounted police arrived to restore order.

In the evening a group of some thirty or forty men, with as many boys, carrying O'Connell's colours, paraded some of the streets, violently assaulted a peaceable passer-by and broke a number of windows. So ended the first election day in Sydney.

(Source: Adapted from *A Century of Journalism*: The Sydney Morning Herald *and Its Record of Australian Life 1831–1931,* John Fairfax & Sons, Sydney, 1931)

Glossary

candidate – a person running for election to a political position

hustings – a platform where speakers stand to address a crowd of listeners

nomination – somebody put forward as a suitable person for election

polling – what happens at a political election including the casting, recording and counting of votes

polling booth – a small cubicle where people can vote

returning officer – an election official who supervises the counting of votes and announces the result

riot – a violent public disturbance where people are noisy and out of control

whale lance – a long spear with a metal point used to kill whales

© Australian Electoral Commission 2010