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Edited by Helen Irving

Frontmatter

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the
CENTENARY
COMPANION
to
AUSTRALIAN
FEDERATION

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C O N T E N T S

Preface	<i>v</i>
Timeline	<i>viii</i>
List of Contributors	<i>xiii</i>
Note on Terms	<i>xvii</i>
Metric Equivalents of Imperial Measures	<i>xxii</i>

Introduction	<i>1</i>
---------------------	-----------------

PART I 17

THE COLONIES' PATHS TO FEDERATION

1	New South Wales	Helen Irving	<i>19</i>
2	Queensland	Geoffrey Bolton and Duncan Waterson	<i>93</i>
3	South Australia	J. C. Bannon	<i>129</i>
4	Tasmania	James Warden	<i>187</i>
5	Victoria	Marian Quartly	<i>219</i>
6	Western Australia	Brian de Garis	<i>285</i>

PART II 327

FEDERATION A-Z: SHORT ENTRIES

<i>Appendix 1</i>	Delegates to Federation Meetings	<i>437</i>
<i>Appendix 2</i>	The Commonwealth in 1901	<i>439</i>
<i>Appendix 3</i>	The Constitution of the Australian Commonwealth, 1901	<i>442</i>
	Further reading	<i>463</i>
	Index	<i>465</i>

P R E F A C E

The Australian Commonwealth, formed by the Federation of six Australian colonies, will be one hundred years old on 1 January 2001. This book has been written as a ‘Companion’ to the Centenary celebrations. It has two purposes: to make the story of Federation accessible to popular readership, and to be the first comprehensive account of Federation.

The book is divided into two sections: the first, in six chapters, gives a detailed history of each of the individual colonies as they made their way towards membership — as states — of the Australian Commonwealth. These chapters aim to show the distinctive character and contribution of each colony, as well as the common national purpose which finally drew them together. The second part of the book consists of more than two hundred short entries arranged alphabetically. These are intended both as sources of historical information and as ready references for readers who might wish to know, for example, who was eligible to vote in the 1890s, or in which town or building the various Federation Conventions took place. They also introduce a new approach, by including entries on subjects — for example, Science, Sport, Verse — which are not normally thought of as part of the story of Federation, but which turn out to have a rich connection to it. Non-British, or ‘ethnic’, communities of the 1890s have, in many cases, their own entry. So does every single delegate to the Federation Conference and Conventions of the 1890s. The longest of the short entries — New Zealand — provides an important new perspective on the colony that refused to become Australia’s seventh state.

Australians (at least in the large states) sometimes forget that Australia is a federation: a union of separate and semi-autonomous regional parts. In its structure and approach, *The Centenary Companion to Australian Federation* emphasises Australia’s federal nature: the Commonwealth of Australia is both a single nation-state, and a collection of parts. In the nineteenth century, federations were thought of as a particularly successful political solution for managing diversity, and for practising what is now fashionably called ‘subsidiarity’, that is, decision-making devolved to its most appropriate level. In the late twentieth century, simultaneous developments in the United Kingdom and Europe towards simultaneous regional autonomy and transnational union make it likely that federations and their history will gain renewed interest and, perhaps, renewed respect. In Australia commitment to the Federation seems as strong, if not stronger than ever. Proposals to abolish the states, in circulation for many decades, have never come close to being a reality. Certainly, a history of Federation in which the part played by each of the states was not fully recognised would now appear quite inappropriate.

Preface

vi

As the twentieth century comes to a close, there are further reasons for scrutiny of the original design of the Commonwealth. Much debate has taken place in the 1990s over whether Australians should alter their Constitution, removing the references to the Crown and inserting a republican model in their place. A referendum on this question will be held in late 1999. It will mirror the referendums of one hundred years earlier, in which Australia's voters gave their verdict on the Constitution under which they would henceforth live. Never in the twentieth century has the history of the 'indissoluble Federal Commonwealth under the Crown' of which the Constitution's Preamble speaks been so relevant to a referendum. The Australians who agitated for Federation, who wrote and passed the Constitution, now seem to watch us from beyond the grave. Their story is still part of the story whose century-long chapter is coming to a close. If we do not know that story, how can we understand its sequel?

Although a good deal has been written about Federation over the years since 1901, no full, national account has been undertaken before. One celebrated history — Quick and Garran's *Annotated Constitution of the Australian Commonwealth*, published in 1901 — still gives great service, and remains indispensable to current historians. It was written by two of the central participants in the Federation story, and this, combined with its dense historical detail, gives it an authority and an ancestral greatness that will never be challenged. But Quick and Garran's work is not easily accessed: their Federation history forms the Introduction to a massive, heavy and rarely published volume of constitutional commentary. Its focus is on the organised events of Federation, so that the colonies of Western Australia, Tasmania and Queensland, where few Federation meetings or conferences took place, get little attention compared to New South Wales, Victoria or South Australia. It identifies Federation exclusively as a political process, where readers in the late twentieth century may want to know also about the social and cultural context in which the political steps were taken. And it is, simply, an old-style history, not in any way obsolete, but somewhat alien to current standards of writing and approach.

The Centenary Companion to Australian Federation owes its conceptual origins to a seminar organised by Jill Roe at Macquarie University in mid-1992, at which historians and political scientists gathered to discuss their plans for a scholarly contribution to the Centenary. The particular approach it adopts was inspired by an observation of the late J. A. La Nauze in the preface to his *The Making of the Australian Constitution* (Melbourne University Press, 1972). A 'much-needed general history' of Federation remained to be written, La Nauze wrote, but it would be the work of 'another hand' than his own.

Reflecting on why such a history had still not been produced twenty years later, it was this editor's conclusion that no single hand could hope to cover the full Federation story, while giving adequate treatment to each of the colonies and its individual path to Federation in 1901. The *Companion* was thus designed as the work of many hands, and if it is not the single-authored history La Nauze originally had in mind, it has certainly been assisted — as he also

Preface

vii

intended — by his own work on the origins of the Constitution. Indeed, it is hard to imagine how any progress on Federation history could now be made without the meticulous, pioneering research of La Nauze.

The Centenary Companion to Australian Federation aims to be a general history, to fill in the gaps left by Quick and Garran and later Federation histories. But it does not claim to be the definitive account of Federation. Many more histories will and should be written. In particular, local histories — the contribution of individual towns and regions to Federation — remain to be researched and written. Ideally, there should be hundreds of such histories, written on the ground by local historians themselves who will understand best the relation between regional cultures, local personalities and political movements.

In one hundred years, as the Bicentenary of Federation approaches, historians will no doubt read this *Companion* with a critical eye, pointing out what it has overlooked, which issues or actors have been left out of the picture. We hope that they will, in addition, make use of what it has included. But for the moment, it is the present readers of history, who may know little about their own nation's birth, who will find this *Companion* of use and, it is hoped, of interest. They will then be able to enjoy the Centenary with a greater understanding of what it is they are celebrating.

The publication of this book has been assisted by a subsidy from the National Council for the Centenary of Federation. The editor warmly thanks the Council, as well as all the contributors, in particular John Bannon, for meticulously reading much of the manuscript, and Stuart Macintyre, for generous and useful advice. The assistance of the Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW, is also gratefully acknowledged. Phillipa McGuinness at Cambridge University Press was an enthusiast for the project right from the start and supported it throughout. Much is due to her as well.

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T I M E L I N E

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|------|---|
| 1846 | First official suggestion of a ‘federal’ scheme for the Australasian colonies (assumed to have come from Legislative Councillor, Edward Deas Thomson), forwarded by Governor Fitzroy to the British Colonial Office. |
| 1847 | Secretary of State for the Colonies, Earl Grey, proposes a ‘General Assembly’ to deal with, among other things, tariffs, postal services, intercolonial roads and railways. |
| 1848 | William Wentworth raises the desirability of an ‘Australian Congress ... with powers to pass laws on intercolonial questions’, in the New South Wales Legislative Council. |
| 1849 | Committee of the Privy Council reports on Grey’s proposal, suggesting the creation of a ‘General Assembly’ consisting of a Governor-General and ‘House of Delegates’, authorised to deal with many intercolonial questions, including establishing a Supreme Court. |
| 1850 | The <i>Australian Colonies Government Act</i> , passed by the British Parliament, separates the Port Phillip District (Victoria) from New South Wales. It provides for Legislative Councils in Victoria, South Australia and Van Diemen’s Land. |
| 1852 | John Dunmore Lang proposes a Federal Republic of Australia in <i>Freedom and Independence for the Golden Lands of Australia</i> . |
| 1853 | Committee of the New South Wales Legislative Council, chaired by William Wentworth, proposes a General Assembly of the colonies. |
| 1855 | Responsible government granted in New South Wales.
Van Diemen’s Land renamed Tasmania. |
| 1857 | Responsible government gained in South Australia, Victoria, Tasmania.
Edward Deas Thomson proposes the creation of a Federal Assembly. |
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Timeline

ix

William Wentworth, in London, prepares a ‘Memorial’ for the Secretary of State for the Colonies, arguing the case for a Federal Assembly.

Select Committees on Federation in Victoria, New South Wales and South Australia.

1858	Second Select Committee on Federation in Victoria.
1859	Moreton Bay District separates from New South Wales, as Queensland.
1860	Responsible government granted in Queensland.
1863	Northern Territory transferred from New South Wales to South Australia.
1867	Intercolonial Postal Conference, Melbourne, resolves that there should be a Federal Council.
1868	British Government refuses to pass the New South Wales Bill for the Federal Council.
1870	Victorian Royal Commission on Federation.
1871	Australian Natives’ Association formed in Melbourne.
1873	<i>Australian Colonies Duties Act</i> passed by the British Parliament, allowing the colonies to levy differential tariffs against each other.
1879	First intercolonial trade union conference, in Sydney.
1880	The <i>Bulletin</i> begins publication.
1881	Intercolonial Conference in Sydney resolves there should be a Federal Council.
1883	Queensland attempts to annex New Guinea to prevent Germany doing the same. Intercolonial Convention in Sydney supports the establishment of a Federal Council. Samuel Griffith prepares a draft Constitution for such a Council.
1885	<i>Federal Council of Australasia Act</i> passed by the Imperial Parliament.

Timeline

x

1886	First Federal Council meeting, Hobart.
1887	Queen Victoria’s Golden Jubilee. First Colonial Conference, London. <i>Australasian Naval Forces Act</i> passed in Britain; it provides for a squadron in Australian waters.
1888	Centenary of the First Fleet’s arrival celebrated in Sydney. Intercolonial ‘Chinese’ Conference, Sydney.
1889	Major-General James Bevan Edwards reports on the defence capabilities of the colonies. Henry Parkes gives the Tenterfield Oration. Premiers agree to a conference to consider Federation.
1890	Australasian Federation Conference, Melbourne. Responsible government achieved in Western Australia. Australian Natives’ Association Conference on Federation, Melbourne.
1891	National Australasian Convention, Sydney. Labor Electoral Leagues formed.
1892	Collapse of banks and building societies heralds the onset of Depression.
1893	Australasian Federation League formed, New South Wales. Corowa Conference passes the Corowa Plan for a new, popular constitutional process.
1894	New South Wales Premier, George Dibbs, suggests unification to Victorian Premier, James Patterson. South Australian women gain the right to vote.
1895	Premiers’ Conference, Hobart, adopts the (modified) Corowa Plan. Standardised time zones adopted in the eastern colonies. Enabling Acts for a new Convention passed in South Australia and New South Wales.

Timeline

xi

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- 1896** Enabling Acts passed in Tasmania, Victoria and Western Australia.
Premiers’ Conference, Sydney, agrees to extend Restricted Immigration Acts.
Death of Sir Henry Parkes.
Bathurst People’s Federal Convention.
-
- 1897** Elections for Convention delegates in Victoria, Tasmania, New South Wales, South Australia.
Western Australian Parliament elects its delegates.
First session of Australasian Federal Convention, Adelaide.
Celebration of Queen Victoria’s Diamond Jubilee.
Second session of the Australasian Federal Convention, Sydney.
-
- 1898** Third session of the Australasian Federal Convention, Melbourne. Convention adopts the draft Constitution of the Australian Commonwealth.
Referendums on the Constitution Bill in New South Wales (unsuccessful), Victoria, Tasmania, South Australia.
First Women’s Federal League formed, Sydney.
‘Federal Association’ formed.
Federation Leagues formed in Queensland, Tasmania, Western Australia.
-
- 1899** Premiers’ ‘Secret’ Conference, Melbourne, agrees to amend the Constitution Bill.
Final meeting of the Federal Council.
United Federal Executive formed in Sydney.
Women’s Federal League formed in Hay.
Second Sydney Women’s Federal League formed.
Successful referendums in South Australia, New South Wales, Tasmania, Victoria and Queensland.
Boer War begins in South Africa.
Western Australian women gain the right to vote.
-
- 1900** Delegation to London to see the Constitution Bill through the Imperial Parliament.

Timeline

xii

Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Act passes the Parliament and receives the royal assent, 9 July.

Announcement, 14 July, that Lord Hopetoun is to be first Governor-General.

Women’s Federal Leagues formed in Western Australia.

Eastern Goldfields Reform League formed.

Successful referendum in Western Australia, 31 July.

Proclamation of the Commonwealth, 17 September.

New Zealand appoints a Royal Commission on joining the Federation.

Lord Hopetoun arrives in Australia, and appoints William Lyne as first Prime Minister. Edmund Barton organises a revolt, and is appointed in Lyne’s place.

-
- 1901** Inauguration of the Commonwealth, 1 January, Sydney.
- Death of Queen Victoria, 22 January.
- First Federal elections, 29–30 March.
- New Zealand decides not to join the Federation.
- Opening of the first Federal Parliament, 9 May, Melbourne.

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xiv

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Contributors

xv

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[More information](#)

Contributors

xvi

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The Introduction and all unattributed short entries are the work of the Editor.

NOTE ON TERMS

Clause

Sections of the first draft of the Commonwealth Constitution were known as ‘clauses’. For the second, and final, draft, they were called ‘sections’. These terms are used in places in the text accordingly.

Colonies

From the eighteenth to the early twentieth centuries, Britain and other European powers claimed and occupied land around the globe, proclaiming this land as their Empire colonies. The continent of Australia, the islands of Tasmania, New Zealand, Fiji and Norfolk Island, among others, were divided into British colonies. From the mid-nineteenth century, these colonies evolved into semi-independence; the Australian colonies then became states of the Commonwealth of Australia in 1901.

It should be noted that South Australia preferred to call itself a ‘province’ rather than a colony, for reasons that are explained in Chapter 3, ‘South Australia’. However, where all of the six future states are referred to together, they are collectively called the Australian colonies. The *Australasian* colonies included New Zealand and Fiji.

Commonwealth

‘Commonwealth’ was the name given to Australia as a political (as opposed to a geographical or social) entity. The name was included in the first draft Australian Constitution in 1891, and officially employed from the time of Federation. It should not be confused with the Commonwealth of Nations, the name given in 1946 to the association of the former British Empire colonies, and best known now in regard to the Commonwealth Games.

Constitution Bill

Before an Act is passed by Parliament and receives the assent of the Head of State, it is known as a Bill (for an Act).

Before the moment of its passage as an Act of the Imperial Parliament (July 1900), the Constitution of the Commonwealth of Australia took the form of a series of draft Bills written at the Federation Conventions of 1891 and 1897–98. Then, when the draft Constitution had been completed in early

Note on Terms

xviii

1898, the Constitution was put to the voters at referendums, in the form of a Bill.

During the referendums it was thus referred to, variously, as the ‘Constitution Bill’, the ‘Commonwealth Bill’, the ‘Federal Constitution Bill’, or the ‘Convention Bill’ (hence the colloquial terms ‘Billites’ and ‘anti-Billites’, for supporters and opponents of the Bill). For consistency (except where quoting contemporary sources, where the alternatives may appear), the terms used here are ‘Constitution Bill’ or ‘draft Constitution’.

Convention

‘Convention’ is used in two, unrelated senses in Australia’s constitutional history. The first means simply tradition or established practice. Many aspects of British politics are ‘conventions’, adhered to because they are long-established practices, rather than because they are written into either statute or Constitution. Both the Australian colonial Parliaments and the Commonwealth Constitution adopted many of the unwritten conventions of British politics. For example, by convention, the Premier or Prime Minister must always be a Member of the Lower House of Parliament.

The other sense of Convention refers to the meetings at which Australia’s Constitution was framed. The term ‘Convention’ was adopted to indicate that these meetings were extraordinary, outside normal parliamentary procedure, and that their authority derived from a source above and beyond the Parliament. In Australia in the 1890s, this source of authority was taken to be the Australian people.

The formal titles of these meetings were:

- Australasian Federation Conference (Melbourne, 1890)
- National Australasian Convention (Sydney, 1891)
- National Australasian Convention (during the Adelaide session of the 1897–1898 Convention)
- Australasian Federal Convention (during both the Sydney session, 1897, and the Melbourne session, 1898).

Informally, these meetings were referred to, variously, as the ‘Federal’ or ‘Federation’ Conference and ‘Federal’ or ‘Federation’ Conventions.

For convenience and clarity, they are referred to in the Short Entries as the Federation Conference, 1890, and the Federation Convention, 1891 or 1897–98.

Crown Colonies

Those of Britain’s colonies which did not have ‘responsible government’, that is, were not yet self-governing, were known as Crown Colonies. They were directly administered from Britain. Western Australia, being the last of the Australian colonies to gain responsible government, remained a Crown Colony until 1890.

Note on Terms

xix

Deadlocks

For an ordinary Bill to become an Act of Parliament in a system like Australia’s, it must pass through both Houses of Parliament. Where one House passes the Bill, but the other rejects it or fails to pass it, and the originating House attempts unsuccessfully to have it passed a further time, a ‘deadlock’ ensues. Australia’s Constitution provides for there to be a simultaneous full election of both Houses of Parliament in such an event. The rationale is that the electors are asked to give their verdict on the disputed Bill, by re-electing or dismissing the Members of either House of Parliament.

Delegates

Members of the Federation Convention of 1891 were officially known as ‘delegates’, and of 1897–98 as ‘representatives’. As J. A. La Nauze notes in *The Making of the Australian Constitution*, both of these terms (as well as ‘Honourable Member’) were indifferently and loosely used by members of the Conventions themselves. In keeping with La Nauze’s choice, the generic ‘delegate’ has been used.

Enabling Bills or Acts

Acts or proposed Acts (Bills) of Parliament, which provide for certain events or processes to take place are called ‘Enabling’ Acts or Bills. The most significant of the colonial Enabling Acts of the 1890s were those providing for the election of delegates to the 1897–98 Federation Convention and the referendums on the Constitution Bill.

Federation

A federation is a political system in which the power to make laws is divided between a central legislature and regional legislatures. The centre makes laws for the nation as a whole, while the regions make laws for their region only. Both sets of laws impact directly upon the lives of the citizens. The power of the centre is limited, in theory at least, to those matters which concern the nation as a whole. The regions are intended to be as free as possible to pursue their own local interests. Historically, federations have adopted written Constitutions in which this division is described, and which include a means of settling disputes between the regions and the centre.

In Australia, the centre is the Commonwealth and the regions are the states, each with its own Parliament. In the Commonwealth Parliament, the House of Representatives represents the nation as a whole, and the Senate represents each of the states. The High Court is the body which settles disputes on the grounds of constitutional validity.

Note on Terms

xx

The term ‘Federation’ (without the definite article) is used in Australia to refer to the historical processes by which the Australian Commonwealth was created.

Federation Leagues

Most organisations of supporters of Federation were formally known in the 1890s as Federation Leagues, but were commonly also called ‘Federal Leagues’. In consistency with the use of ‘federationists’, the term Federation Leagues has been preferred here.

Federationists

In the 1890s, supporters of Federation were referred to variously as ‘federalists’ or ‘federationists’. Except where the text directly quotes from contemporary sources, they are referred to here as ‘federationists’. At the time of the referendums on the Constitution Bill, supporters were sometimes referred to as ‘Billites’, and opponents commonly as ‘anti-Billites’.

Imperial Parliament

When acting in respect of the laws and affairs of the colonies of the British Empire, the British Parliament was referred to as the ‘Imperial Parliament’. The term ‘Imperial Government’ was also used in this respect.

Labour

The spelling of the word ‘labour’, or ‘labor’ varied in the 1890s. ‘Labour’ generally refers to the labour movement, and ‘labor’ to the political party. But in the nineteenth century, while the party was still emerging, it was sometimes referred to as the ‘Labour Party’, as with the British Labour Party. There was also a tendency in that period to use American spelling generally, and for this reason ‘labor’ may appear in direct quotes from the period, even where it refers to the movement, rather than the party. Where the word appears, however it is spelled, it should be simply read in its context in the text.

Natives

In Australia in the nineteenth century, the term ‘native’ was popularly employed to mean ‘native-born’, that is, born in Australia rather than overseas. Its most memorable use was in the name of the Australian Natives’ Association, an organisation of white men born in the colonies, which was very active in Federation. The aboriginal people of Australia were most commonly referred to simply as ‘aborigines’, although occasionally as ‘aboriginal natives of Australia’.

Original State

The expression used to describe those Australian colonies which joined the Commonwealth in 1901 was ‘Original State’; that is, they were the ‘original’

Note on Terms

xxi

members of the Commonwealth. Original States received certain constitutional guarantees, including the same numbers of Senators as each other, and a minimum of five Members of the House of Representatives regardless of their population size. Any state which joined the Commonwealth or was created after 1901 would not be ‘original’ and would not automatically enjoy such guarantees.

Privy Council

Whether or not there should be appeals from the Australian High Court to the Privy Council was an important issue in the 1890s. Strictly speaking, only the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council, and not the Council as such, could hear appeals. In the short entries, cross-reference to the ‘Judicial Committee’ and the ‘Privy Council’ have sought to make this clear. However, in literature on the Constitution and Federation and in the debates of the 1890s, the less precise term ‘Privy Council’ is almost always used rather than Judicial Committee.

Responsible Government

The expression ‘responsible government’ is commonly used in a number of ways. Loosely, it refers to self-government, as in the acquisition by the colonies of their own Parliaments in the nineteenth century. More precisely, the term means a system of parliamentary government in which British practices and institutions — including, among other things, the existence of a Cabinet, the formation of governments in the Lower House of Parliament, and a non-elected Head of State — are adopted. Even more precisely, it refers to the requirement that Ministers of state (i.e., heads of executive Departments) should be Members of Parliament, rather than appointed from outside the Parliament. ‘Responsible government’ may sometimes be used simply to mean British (or Westminster) government, as distinct from American government. The term is also used at times interchangeably with ‘representative government’.

Senior Colony

New South Wales, being the oldest of the colonies, was often referred to as the senior colony. It was also frequently called the ‘Mother Colony’ (see Chapter 1, ‘New South Wales’). Both of these terms are used, in their appropriate context, throughout the *Companion*.

Small Colonies

The expression ‘small colonies’ (or ‘small states’) is employed throughout the *Companion*, as it was in the nineteenth century, to mean the colonies with small populations, compared to the ‘large’ colonies/states (i.e., Victoria and New South Wales). The term ‘small’ has nothing to do with the size of the area or land.

METRIC EQUIVALENTS OF IMPERIAL MEASURES

Length

- 1 inch = 25.4 mm
- 1 foot = 30.5 cm
- 1 yard = 0.91 m
- 1 mile = 1.6 km

Area

- 1 sq. yard = 0.84 m²
- 1 acre = 0.40 ha
- 1 sq. mile = 2.59km²



