

# Our Federation Journey

## 1901 - 2001

Proudly Sponsored by Australian Unity



## Topic One - Federation Arches

2001 marks 100 years since Federation - when Australia became a nation. Our Federation Journey is an information sheet series which highlights various aspects of Federation, focusing on the experiences of Victoria

*The arches rose over the great masses of the people in the gorgeousness of their colours like so many rainbows set against a cloudless sky. The senses were whirled away with the bewildering spectacle, and for moments together buildings, people and arches alike were blended in a dizzy hundred-tinted wave of colour.*

*The Age, 7 May 1901*

### Celebrating with Arches

When Australia became a nation in 1901, the occasion prompted a flurry of arch building. In May, nine temporary ceremonial arches were built in Melbourne, two in St Kilda and four in Ballarat. Even small towns like Rokewood joined in with simple arches of greenery.

On 1 January 1901, the Commonwealth of Australia was inaugurated in Sydney. Arches decorated the streets. Victoria's contribution was an arch declaring "Melbourne rejoices in the Commonwealth".

With Victoria's major figures away in Sydney, the celebrations back home were generally restrained. No inauguration arches were built in Melbourne. Some towns and suburbs organised their own events. Sale held a procession and erected a small arch.

In May, Victoria became the centre of attention. The Duke and Duchess of Cornwall and York visited to open the first Commonwealth Parliament. This combined honour ensured great revelry in Melbourne and throughout Victoria. Brightly painted banners, fluttering flags and sparkling lights decorated the streets and buildings. New plaster and paint finishes gave timber arches the solid appearance of marble and stone. The elaborate and vividly coloured arches were finished with rich fabrics, gold trim and patriotic decorations.

### The Municipal Arch

For the May 1901 celebrations, the Prince's Bridge was transformed into an imposing gateway to Melbourne. The Municipal Arch was the centrepiece of the bridge decorations which also included Venetian flag poles and flaming towers.

The Municipal Arch's design was described as "early Renaissance" or "Roman-Doric". Like the Commonwealth Arch in Sydney, it was similar to the Arc de Triomphe du Carrousel (1808) in Paris and the Marble Arch (1828) in London. All drew inspiration from Roman structures such as the Arch of Septimius Severus (203 AD) in Libya, and the Arch of Constantine (316 AD) in Rome.

Following the Roman tradition, the arch was inscribed with mottoes and poetry. It included the Latin motto from the British Coat of Arms and lines by the poets Virgil and Tennyson. Extending from the arch was the bow of the "Austral", a Roman-style ship. The six oars were inscribed with the names of the States. A lion's head symbolised imperialism.



# Our Federation Journey 1901 - 2001



The arch was intended to stand for 12 months. A protective galvanised iron roof, and new finishes such as rubberoid and waterproof paint were used. Sadly, only two weeks after the celebrations ended, the *Argus* commented,

*The once beautiful arch on the bridge is daily becoming less and less beautiful, and the 'ravages of time' are likely soon to convert it into a disfigurement of the chief entrance to the city.*

## Monarchy and Empire

Although it was a new nation, Australia had a British head of state, sang "God Save the King" as its anthem and flew the Union Jack.

Unlike the Sydney arches in January, the Melbourne arches had a strongly royal theme. The Victorian Government built arches to honour the King, the Duke and the late Queen Victoria. These were covered in royal symbols, images, colours and patriotic mottoes. Loyalty to the monarch was also obvious in the other arches and decorations.

*Table Talk's* female columnist freely admitted that the "revelry and pageantry" of the Commonwealth celebrations was really in honour of the royal couple.

Radical newspapers like *Tocsin* and the *Bulletin* criticised the "grovel" made to the 'Jookoyork'. The *Bulletin's* female reporter in Melbourne complained, "There was too much Cornwall-and-York and too little Commonwealth on all the mottoes and designs".



Queen Victoria's Arch, Collins and Russell Streets, May 1901

The cost was also criticised, as in this poem from the *Bulletin*,

And who will pay the bill?...  
For the fireworks, gorge, and swill,  
For the arch on the street and hill?  
Why - the common people will!

## Arches for a City Beautiful?

We see what wonders can be worked with arches, what pleasure they give to the eye, what charming interruption to the skyline. Why not...discuss the advisability of erecting a permanent arch or two in granite or marble to be a beauty and a joy forever?

*Table Talk*, 2 May 1901

From the late 1880s to the early 1920s, Australia was influenced by the City Beautiful movement. The movement, from the United States, sought to create beautiful and harmonious civic designs. It promoted classic Renaissance principles including the use of arches. Ballarat's Avenue of Honour Arch is a rare example of a permanent arch.

During the Centenary of Federation in 2001 the Tattersall's Federation Arch will be stand on the Princes Bridge, in the same spot as the Municipal Arch in 1901. Then it will be shifted to another location in Melbourne for 10 years. It acknowledges the use of Federation arches a century ago and, with a modern twist, keeps the tradition alive.

Anna Wholley

Curator- Federation, Museum Victoria



Tattersall's Federation Arch - A Gift to the People of Australia  
Princes Bridge 2001



Proudly sponsored by



Images are reproduced with permission from the State Library of Victoria, Museum Victoria and Centenary of Federation Victoria

Want to find out more?? Visit our website at [www.federation.vic.gov.au](http://www.federation.vic.gov.au)

# Federation Arches

