

Our Federation Journey

1901 - 2001

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TOPIC THREE - LOCAL FEDERATION HISTORY

Finding out about the Federation history of your town, suburb or school can create a connection to the larger story of Federation, and provide information and ideas for planning Centenary of Federation activities.

You may choose to concentrate on a particular event, period or theme. Different types of information will suit different purposes eg. events, books, exhibitions, school or family histories and trail brochures.

EVENTS - The process of Federation

Before 1901 the current states were separate self-governing colonies. Each made individual arrangements regarding trade, defence, immigration, transport and communications. Customs duties were charged on goods crossing colonial borders.

The idea of a federal system was first raised in the 1840s, but did not gain momentum until the 1880s and 1890s. A series of conferences were held to discuss Federation and develop a national constitution. Most Victorians supported Federation, but were conscious of protecting the interests of their colony and local area. At the 1899 referendum, nearly 94% of Victorians who voted supported Federation.

- Was your community involved in particular issues relating to Federation? eg. trade, customs duties, railways, defence or immigration.
- Is there evidence of growing nationalism prior to Federation in your area? eg. speeches, business or product names such as 'Federal Hotel', poetry, paintings, Australian imagery on craftwork etc.

Federation celebrations in 1901

The main Federation celebrations in Victoria were held in May 1901 when the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall and York came out to Australia to open the first Federal Parliament at the Exhibition Building.



Waiting for the Royal carriage, 15 Kloof St, Ballarat, Street celebrations, 1901

Key dates

1840s-1850s	First references to a federal system
1890s	Conferences, conventions and meetings about Federation
1898, 3 June & 1899, 27 July	Federation referendums
1901	
1 January	Inauguration of the Commonwealth of Australia in Sydney
29 March	First Federal Elections
May	Opening of the first Federal Parliament on 9 May 1901, and related events.
14 May	Schools' Flag-raising Ceremony. Often local celebrations were focussed around this event.

Search the period around Federation-related dates to find local comments on the events or details about what happened in your area. See the Australian Archive's website (below) for an extensive Federation chronology.

To avoid conflicting with these major events, some areas held their local celebrations slightly earlier or later. Many local events, such as picnics and sports days, took place on 14 May 1901 in association with the ceremony to simultaneously hoist the Union Jack flag at schools around Australia.

The impact of Federation on your community

- The introduction of Commonwealth legislation, institutions and projects affected many areas such as the railways, post offices, social services, tariffs, trade, immigration policy and the River Murray Commission. What was the impact in your area?

PEOPLE

- Who was for or against Federation in your community? Not everyone was supportive of Federation. This depended largely on the industry and agriculture of particular area, and whether free-trade or protection was beneficial for the regions' economy. In addition, not everyone had a chance to participate in the discussions and celebrations.
- How did your area vote in the 1898 and 1899 referendums? Results are listed in local papers of the time, but remember, not everyone could vote, and not everyone that was allowed to vote, actually did. Who was denied a vote in your community?

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- Who from your area attended the 1901 celebrations in Sydney or Melbourne? Were they invited guests, participants in processions and displays, or onlookers? Were there any major figures from your area? Who were the local politicians of the day? All parliamentarians, state and federal, were invited to the Opening of Parliament celebrations. Perhaps their families still live in the area.
- Groups and societies for, or against, Federation were formed in most local communities. Look for evidence of the Australian Natives Association (the ANA), or local Federal Leagues. Anti-federal clubs were also formed, and these are generally known as 'anti-Billite'.
- Did any dignitaries or 'important people' visit your area to attend a Federation meeting or conference, or start a Federal League? Did the royal couple visit on their royal tour in 1901?

PLACES:

- What sites of Federation meetings, conferences or speeches are in your area? Places where referendum votes were cast, customs houses and Australian Natives Association meeting halls can all contribute to your Federation history.
- Melbourne was the interim capital until 1927. Perhaps there were proposals for your town to become the capital of Australia.
- Look for photographs of places where Federation events or celebrations were held, for example decorated buildings and buildings or businesses named 'Federal' or 'Commonwealth'.

SOURCES:

- Start by looking in **local or state libraries, local historical societies, archives or museums** for records about Federation. Records can be held by private organisations or individuals as well. Search the Internet for sites relating to Federation, or your area.
- **Local and major newspapers**, such as the *Age* and *Argus*, are excellent sources of information. Articles will reflect whether a newspaper supported or opposed Federation.
- **Minutes and records of the local council, societies and organisations** will often have information about the celebrations planned for your local area.
- Try to find records of the ANA, Federal Leagues, schools and organisers of meetings and events.
- **Documents, objects and images** are all good sources of Federation material. Think broadly about what kinds of sources you might try.

Hints

- * Record all your sources (ie. author/s, title, publisher, date, page/s, website, interview details, photograph sources etc). This is an important part of good research and makes it easier for you or someone else to find the original information again.
- * Remember that not everything which is said or written is necessarily true. You may find that different sources provide conflicting information. Where possible seek to confirm details by using a range of sources.

For instance letters, diaries, photographs, certificates, medals and badges, invitations, programs, souvenirs, postcards, flags, paintings, ceramics, craftwork all provide valuable information.

- **Most local history books** provide little detail about Federation, but try searching by date or on topics such as Federation, royal visits, Deakin, or referendums. The sources below may not provide information about your area, but are helpful to put local research in context:

- ◆ Foster SG, Marsden S and Russell S, *Federation: The guide to records*, Australian Archives, 1998 includes an extensive Federation bibliography and chronology. Also available at: http://www.naa.gov.au/Publications/Research_Guide/sfedguide/navigation/index.htm
- ◆ Irving, H (ed), *The Centenary Companion to Australian Federation*, Cambridge University Press, 1999.
- ◆ Lahey, J, *Faces of Federation: An illustrated history*, Royal Historical Society of Victoria, 2000.
- ◆ Milne, T, *Researching Federation: A manual*, 1901 Centre UTS, 1999.
- ◆ O'Keefe, B and Pearson, M, *Federation: a national survey of heritage places*, Australian Heritage Commission, 1998

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Local Federation History