



“Nurungi” (Remembered)

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE CONCORD HERITAGE SOCIETY

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MEETINGS

General Meetings

2nd Wednesday of month
at 7:30 pm in the
Concord Citizens' Centre

Executive Meetings

4th Wednesday of month
at 7:45 pm in the
Concord Citizens' Centre

Committee Meetings

Contact Chairpersons
Museum

Fred Stansfield, 9743-1866

Walker Estates

Errol Grace, 9743-4301

Heritage

David Hayes, 9736-1284

Oral History

Lola Sharp, 8753-0659
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MUSEUM

5 Wellbank Street
Open 2:00 - 4:00 pm
Wednesday & Saturday

No. 70

October/November 2001

Next Meeting

Wednesday November 14, 2001 at 7. 30 pm, Vann Cremer will speak to us about “History of the Post Office”

Future Meetings

Wednesday 12th December - Christmas Barbecue - Rhodes Rotary park from 6. 00 pm.

All food will be supplied, BYO liquid refreshment. We will have some plastic cutlery and paper plates but please feel free to bring your own cutlery and crockery if you wish - and insect repellent would be advisable.

Cost will be \$10 per head (children free) and bookings are essential for catering purposes. Payment in advance if possible, please.

January - There will be no general meeting in January.

Wednesday, 13th February at 7:30 p. m. - Speaker will be Des Milligan and his subject “Military Preparedness and the Lack of It”. This talk was stimulated by recent events in East Timor. Those of you who heard his last talk on “Growing up in India” will not want to miss this and those who missed him last time have something to look forward to.

Haberfield Tour - Saturday, 24th November

If you haven't booked for this outing yet, please get in touch with the Secretary as soon as possible. This will be a chance to learn a little more of the history, heritage and importance of one of our neighbours.

Cost is \$17. 00 and includes a guided tour of the garden suburb of Haberfield, conducted by Vincent Crow, a man who is passionate about the area. This will be followed by afternoon tea at Ashfield Infants' Home and a guided tour there.

The bus will leave the museum at 12:45 pm sharp and should return around 5:00 p. m.

We need a minimum of 40 people to make this outing cost effective so please feel free to invite friends and neighbours.

For those who have previously booked, would you please phone 9744-8528 to confirm the booking and you will need to pay an extra \$2.00 if you've already paid.

“Betrayed and Forsaken”

This book, which is the official history of The Infants' Home, Ashfield, has now been published and will be available on our day there at a cost of \$35. 00

This month's quotation:

Curiosity is the very basis of education and if you tell me that curiosity killed the cat, I say only that the cat died nobly.

Arnold Edinborough

Know your Suburb?

What is the name of the Centre incorporating Central Concord Post Office?

The answer: *Monica Centre*

Federation History

The idea of joining the Australian colonies together had been in the minds of officials for many decades before 1901 when Federation was achieved, even before the division of the Colonies into the familiar areas of land that have since remained almost unchanged (with only the Northern Territory separating from South Australia in 1911) and which shaped the States of the Commonwealth. In the decade before the separation of Victoria (1851) and Queensland (1859) from New South Wales which completed the colonial 'mapping' of the nineteenth century, the federal 'idea was already in the air'.

Earl Grey, Britain's Colonial Secretary, took the first formal initiative in this direction, sketching among other things, in 1847, the idea of a General Assembly to act as a central authority within Australia itself. In doing so, he made a list of what he considered to be the common concerns and interests of all the Colonies over which the Assembly might have jurisdiction: customs duties, postal services, roads and railways. This might seem an unobjectionable, even modest undertaking, but the colonists themselves were outraged at the lack of

consultation.

Only a year later, however, **William Wentworth**, while still protesting, moved a motion in the New South Wales Parliament in which he commended the idea of a General Assembly. But this too led to dispute, this time over the dominance of New South Wales in any such scheme, and both Grey's and Wentworth's proposals came to nothing.

Over the following decades, federal schemes appeared with regularity. Those coming from the British authorities were particularly concerned with solving the problem caused by the regime of varying import tariffs in the Colonies. 'Home-grown' schemes (such as the Federal Assembly proposed by Edward Deas-Thomson in New South Wales in 1856) tended to embrace a broader range of 'federal' concerns, including land management, postal services, lighthouses, and intercolonial railways and telegraphs. Select Committees were formed in several Colonies on the question and conferences proposed.

At a general intercolonial Conference, in 1867, discussion indeed got so far as to resolve that there should be a Federal Council, with powers over ocean mail subsidies. **Henry Parkes**, at that stage Colonial Secretary in the New South Wales Government, characteristically saw the matter in visionary terms, and spoke prophetically of 'a new constellation in the heavens, and the footprints of six young giants [the Colonies] in the morning dew.' But the young giants preferred their own patches to the common plot of 'morning dew.'

While, as one federal scheme succeeded another, **almost everyone agreed in principle** that some sort of union was a good idea (and most accepted that tariffs, postal and telegraphic services, transport and immigration, if nothing else, were matters of common concern), each proposal failed as the one before had done. British schemes invariably came up against Australian protests over failure to consult; proposals from New South Wales (which produced the majority) irritated the other Colonies because New South Wales always seemed to allocate itself the pre-eminent place in its scheme. Victorian schemes were rejected by New South Wales because these did not sufficiently recognise that Colony's pre-eminence. And so it went on.

At yet another conference on the tariff question, in

1881, Henry Parkes repeated his trade-mark theme that 'the time is now come'. A Federal authority, he argued, would be the preparation for a full Federation; a Federal Council, with limited powers to legislate on matters of common concern would do the job. For a myriad of reasons, explored throughout this book*, the 1880s would prove the turning point at which the 'federal idea' (found in all the schemes of the previous forty years) would be transformed into the Federation movement.

Two years later, with Henry Parkes out of office and out of the country, another Intercolonial Conference finally committed itself to creating such a body: it would be called the Federal Council of Australasia. Its members were to include New Zealand and Fiji, as well as the six Australian Colonies. The Victorian and New South Wales representatives at the Conference fought with each other and accused each other of wanting to dominate but, astonishingly, this time the proposal proceeded. It was, we may note in anticipation of the later argument, the same year the railway line was joined (albeit on different gauges) all the way from Sydney to Melbourne, and Britain shrugged its shoulders at the Australians' alarm over German designs upon New Guinea.

The Federal Council of Australasia Act was passed by the Imperial (that is, the British) Parliament in August, 1885, and thereafter a body existed which, in theory, would permit all the Colonies to confer every two years and to 'legislate' on 'matters of common Australasian interest, in respect to which united action is desirable, as can be dealt with without unduly interfering with the management of the internal affairs of the several colonies by their respective legislatures.'

Four years later, Premier again, Henry Parkes failed to support the Federal Council, but found once more that the time had come for Federation, when a British War Office examination of the Australian Colonies' defence capability in 1889 concluded with a highly negative report. Parkes met with the New South Wales Governor, Lord Carrington and immediately took up his challenge to 'federate the colonies'. Returning from a Queensland meeting, Parkes spoke to a meeting in one of his former electorates, just across the New South Wales border. There, in what has become known as the 'Tenterfield Oration', Parkes pressed the urgency of

the defence question and the desirability of holding a Convention to devise a federal constitution. He then wrote to the other Premiers and proposed such a meeting.

The meeting took place, in Melbourne, in 1890 and it was followed by a full 'National' Convention in Sydney the following year. There, **the first complete draft Bill for an Australian Constitution was written and adopted**, and the Convention concluded with a commitment on the part of its representatives to put the Bill before their respective Parliaments without delay.

Only Victoria, however, went any distance towards following the plan. As had happened many times before, with changes of government and in addition now with considerable change of fortune brought about by severe Depression, inaction followed. The Bill was 'put by.' It was six years before the second formal Convention would meet, this time over three sessions, in Adelaide and Sydney, 1897 and concluding in Melbourne, 1898.

But much had happened in the meantime. Federation Leagues were established in the majority of Colonies to promote the cause. In New South Wales, branches of these Leagues organised what were to become important meetings in the Federation story: one in Corowa in 1893, a further 'People's Convention' in Bathurst, in 1896.

In between, with all the while the Federal Council continued to meet, a Premiers' Conference was held in Hobart in January, 1895. There the procedure to set in train a new Convention was agreed to, leading to the popular election in early 1897 of ten delegates in each of four Colonies (with the West Australia Parliament choosing its delegates, and Queensland remaining unrepresented). These fifty men then met on March 22 that year, and during sessions lasting several weeks at a time, up to March 17, 1898, they debated and conferred and drafted, and finally came up with a new Constitution for the Commonwealth of Australia.

In the form of a **Bill for an Act of Parliament**, the Constitution was then submitted to the voters in four Colonies in mid-1898, **where it received approval in all but New South Wales**. Then, following what its critics called the 'Secret' Premiers' Conference in January, **1899, certain modifications were made to the Bill, and it was put again to a referendum (this time with Queensland join-**

ing in) and passed.

The Australians had now completed their task of Constitution writing, and the means of federating the Colonies had been determined. It took one more step to activate the process. Unlike in America, where independence had been achieved by declaration, followed by war, the Australian Colonies pursued the alternative means of enactment. A small delegation of colonial politicians took the Constitution Bill, completed and approved, to London in early 1900, and there, after a struggle with the Colonial Secretary over several provisions, they saw the Bill pass through the Imperial Parliament, and receive the Head of State's, Queen Victoria's, signature.

The West Australians acted at last, and held their referendum almost immediately, on July 31. Its preparatory legal processes completed, the Commonwealth of Australia was proclaimed on September 17, and inaugurated on January 1, 1901. But if good luck is best assured by 'breaking a leg', the Commonwealth was favoured in the weeks before, with a small hitch provided by its newly appointed Governor-General, Lord Hopetoun. It was Hopetoun's job to nominate the first Prime Minister, who would hold office, briefly, until the infrastructure existed for the first Commonwealth elections. Hopetoun chose the wrong man. In what has become famous as the 'Hopetoun Blunder', he picked William Lyne, the recently-elected New South Wales Premier and prominent 'anti-Billite' (as opponents of Federation under the 1898 Constitution Bill were called), thereby almost causing a mutiny among those colonial leaders who expected to serve in the interim Cabinet. But Lyne gave way and, Hopetoun nominated Edmund Barton, the popular choice, the former New South Wales politician who had assumed the role of federationist leader and acted as both spokesman and statesman of the movement for almost the entire preceding decade. With Barton in his rightful place, the **Commonwealth Inauguration took place, on the first day of the New Year, the first day of the New Century.**

It is the Centenary of this great event that we celebrated on 1 January 2001.

*If you want to know more: this is an extract from *To Constitute a Nation: A Cultural History of Australia's Constitution*, by Helen Irving, Cambridge University Press

(paperback, 1999). And hot off the press is more essential reading: *The Centenary Companion to Australian Federation*, edited by Helen Irving, Cambridge University Press, released October 1999.

Volunteers

Many thanks to all those who filled in the form in the last Nurungi offering to help with various needs of the Society. Unfortunately, due to Secretary's couple of visits to hospital, we have been unable to organise the work but will be doing so in the near future and will contact you shortly.

Just in case you intended to volunteer but mislaid your form we have enclosed a copy with this newsletter and we can always fit in some more names.

Trish Skehen

Trish has been travelling around the United Kingdom and elsewhere, enjoying a wonderful holiday - but also doing research on our Walker family. She has lot to tell and will regaling us with her tales when she returns.

Dates for the Diary

Thursday, 1st November - Walker Estates/Yaralla Committee - 7:30 pm. at Strathfield North Public School

Wednesday, 14th November - Vann Cremer, "History of the Post Office"

Saturday, 24th November - Haberfield Tour and visit to The Infants' Home, Ashfield

Wednesday, 28th November - Executive Meeting

Wednesday, 12th December - Christmas Barbecue at Rhodes Rotary Park - from 6:00 p. m.

December - No Executive Meeting

January - No General Meeting

Wednesday, 23rd January - Executive meeting.