

AUSTRALIAN POLITICAL LIFE

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‘Father of Federation’s’ Journey to unite Australia

Story by Brianna Spurdle

Sir Henry Parkes, also known as the ‘Father of Federation’, is one of the most significant individuals in Australian history, due to his contributions towards a federated Australia.

Henry Parkes was born on the 27th of May 1815. He was an uneducated man who immigrated from England to Australia in 1839. In 1850 Parkes was running a newspaper called ‘*The Empire*,’ which called for more rights for the people. Then in 1872, because of his support for democracy, he was elected premier of New South Wales. He served five times as premier, before being awarded knighthood by Queen Victoria in 1871.

During 1889, Sir Henry Parkes delivered a speech in Tenterfield, later known as ‘*The Tenterfield Oration*’, where he talked about federation, and uniting Australia. He spoke about how travelling was hard, as the rail gauges were different in each colony. Imported goods were expensive due to tariffs and many Australians were annoyed, as the immigrants got paid more than they did. His speech created enthusiasm about federation.

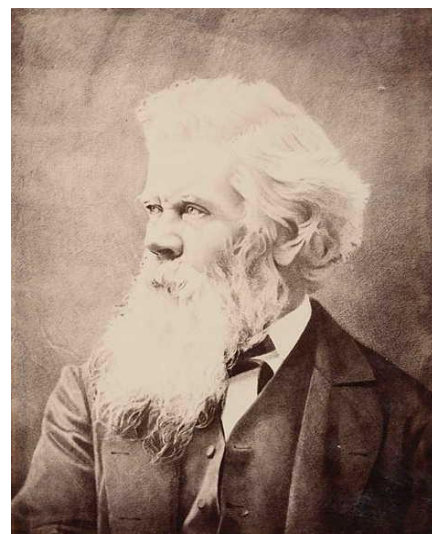
In 1890, Parkes, as well as the premiers of all the six colonies, attended a conference known as the ‘*Australasian Federation Conference*’ in Melbourne. This was a very significant event, as it was the first time Premiers from all the colonies met to discuss a federated nation. The premiers were there to discuss whether Australia should be federated, and all agreed that federation was a good thing, so the next year – 1891 – Parkes attended the Australasian Convention in Sydney. Representatives from the six colonies and New Zealand met there and wrote a draft constitution. The draft

constitution outlined how Australia would be federated.

In 1893 Parkes was supposed to attend ‘*The Corowa Conference*’, but had fallen ill, and was unable to attend.

Unfortunately, Sir Henry Parkes died on the 27th of April 1896, before he could see his dream of a federated Australia. Australia became federated on the 1st of January 1901.

Sir Henry Parkes had a great impact on Australia’s path to federation. Although he did not live to see his dream, he did a lot to bring Australia to what it is today.



Sir Henry Parkes is one of the most significant individuals to contribute to Australia’s Federation.