Building the Nation
From Colonies to Federation
Henry Parkes (1815–1896)

Henry Parkes was born in England, and arrived in Sydney in 1839 as a 24-year-old impoverished immigrant. He is remembered today as the ‘Father of Federation’ for his leading role in bringing the colonies of Australia together as a nation.

Parkes was elected to the New South Wales Legislative Council in 1854 and was Premier five times between 1872 and 1891. Over many years he persuaded fellow Premiers to unite the colonies in order to have the same laws on matters such as free trade, immigration and defence.

He was a powerful speaker, and his speech in 1889 at Tenterfield in New South Wales became famous as a call for the Australian colonies to unite under one government for the defence of all the colonies.

Parkes was responsible for the important convention of 1891 that produced Australia’s first draft Constitution. After losing an election he faded from the political scene.

Unfortunately he did not live to see his dream of Federation fulfilled. He died in 1896, at the time when the People’s Convention was meeting to finalise the Constitution of a united Australia.

Edmund Barton (1849–1920)

Edmund Barton was born in Glebe in Sydney. He became a Member of the New South Wales Parliament in 1879. He enthusiastically supported Henry Parkes’s call for the colonies to federate, and in the 1890s he played a leading role in drafting the Australian Constitution. In 1900, Barton gave up his seat in the New South Wales Parliament to lead the delegation from Australia to London, where he played an important role presenting the case for Federation to the British Government. Edmund Barton was appointed Australia’s first Prime Minister on 1 January 1901. He remained Prime Minister after Australia’s first Federal election on 29 March 1901, but he gave up the Prime Ministership in 1903 to become a judge of the High Court.

Alfred Deakin (1856–1919)

Alfred Deakin was born in Melbourne. He was a Member of the Victorian Legislative Assembly. He worked hard for Federation, using his skills as a lawyer in planning the Constitution in the 1890s. He travelled with Edmund Barton to London to ensure that the British Parliament passed the Constitution Bill to allow the Australian colonies to become a nation. In 1901, Deakin became Attorney-General in Australia’s first Federal Government, and he became Prime Minister in 1903.
John Forrest
(1847–1918)

John Forrest was born near Bunbury in Western Australia. He became famous as an explorer of inland Western Australia. In 1890, when Western Australia was granted self-government, he became the first Premier. Forrest played a leading role in bringing Western Australia into the Federation. He worked hard to ensure that colonies with small populations, like Western Australia, were not bullied by the larger colonies. He obtained an unofficial promise from other leaders in the Federation movement that the Government would build a transcontinental railway linking the west with the east once Australia became a nation. Forrest became Postmaster General in Australia’s first Federal Government in 1901.

Samuel Griffith
(1845–1920)

Samuel Griffith was born in Wales in Britain. He immigrated to Queensland in 1853, and after graduating from Sydney University in law, he became a Member of the Queensland Legislative Assembly. He was Premier of Queensland from 1883 until 1888, and from 1890 until 1893. Griffith played an important role in planning and finalising the Australian Constitution. When the High Court was set up in 1903, Griffith became the Chief Justice of the High Court.

Charles Cameron Kingston
(1850–1908)

Charles Cameron Kingston was born in Adelaide. He became a Member of the South Australian Parliament in 1881 and was Premier from 1893 to 1899. He helped to draft the Constitution and was part of the delegation to London to ensure that the British Parliament passed the Constitution bill. Kingston was a member of the first Federal Government as Minister of Trade and Customs.

John Quick
(1852–1932)

John Quick was born in Cornwall in England. He was a Member of the Victorian Parliament between 1880 and 1889. During the 1890s he was the leader of the Australian Natives Association, which spearheaded the movement for Federation. Quick was responsible for the Corowa Conference, which resulted in a Convention to draft a Constitution for a federated Australia, and in the people of all the colonies voting in a referendum on the issue. In 1901, he was knighted for his services to Federation and became a member of the first Federal Parliament.

Andrew Inglis Clark
(1848–1907)

Andrew Inglis Clark was born in Hobart. In 1890, he became a Member of the Tasmanian Parliament and Attorney-General. He played a very important part in the 1891 convention and was elected as a member of the committee to draft a Constitution. He came to the convention with a constitution he had personally written that was used in the framing of the Constitution. He favoured a form of government similar to that of the United States of America. He did not stand for election to the convention of 1897 but is remembered as a founder of Federation.