



THE PIONEER

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Australia's Road to Federation via Stroud



As it is the beginning of another year in Stroud I felt it would be interesting to look back on how Stroud was involved in the push for the birth of our nation. Australia became a nation in its own right when Federation was granted by the British Parliament on 1 January 1901.

Sir Henry Parkes, "the Father of Federation", came to town on 21 June 1886! Parkes was in town to open Stroud's Temperance Hall and also held a meeting to speak of the benefits of Federation. *The Argus* reported on these events, noting that, 'the remarkable speech delivered by Sir Henry Parkes at Stroud on Monday last is evidence that the question of federation is slowly forging ahead in the neighbouring colony'. In his speech, Parkes stated that "without question the time is ripe for some united effort on the part of this colony to work in harmony with the rest of the colonies ... to bind the colonies together as one country". Stroud entertained a number of people that spoke on the question of federation.

Stroud was also paid a visit by the Honourable Richard O'Connor, a founding member of the Australian Federation League, on 31

May 1898. A meeting was held at the School of Arts. Mr O'Connor 'spoke for nearly two hours in favour of federation and the Commonwealth Bill'. He was well received as the correspondent noted that 'the crowded meeting listened attentively and cheered frequently ... and only three or four hands were held up against the bill'. It was noted that the people of Stroud were 'becoming enthusiastic' for a united Australia.

The push for federation gathered momentum with more visits to Stroud by those in favour of the Bill. But not everyone was in favour and their voices were heard as well. In May 1899, there was a clash of meetings between those championing federalism and the anti-federalists. So that everyone could be heard, a joint meeting was held with each speaker given forty minutes. The speakers were the Hon. J. H. Young (Minister for Works) and Mr Price MLA in favour of the Bill, and Mr George Pils against. Mr Young was the first speaker and he 'pointed out the immense advantages to be obtained from federal union'. Mr Pils argued against the points made by Mr Young. Mr Pils 'was patiently listened to throughout'. Mr Price then spoke and read out portions of the Bill. He spoke of how other countries had obtained their independence. 'He stated that the Bill was more liberal and progressive than any other existing constitution. His remarks met with approval, and he concluded amidst applause'.

The road to Federation certainly had a connection to Stroud and Australia's first Prime Minister, Sir Edmund Barton, was tied to Stroud through his father, William, the Australian Agricultural Company's company accountant who was based in Stroud for a period of time before returning to England. But that is another story.

This article has been predominantly written with reference to newspaper articles noted in the footnotes below. The image was sourced from an online collection. Thanks to Carol Maddocks for her assistance.

~ By Sharon Burke 2015



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