

GETTING IT TOGETHER

From Colonies to Federation



QUEENSLAND

Introduction



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INVESTIGATIONS OF
AUSTRALIA'S JOURNEY
TO NATIONHOOD
FOR THE MIDDLE
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From Colonies to Federation

QUEENSLAND

John Oxley established the Moreton Bay penal settlement in 1824, with the authority then Governor of New South Wales, Thomas Brisbane. The settlement was soon moved to the present site of Brisbane, which became the capital of the new colony of Queensland in 1859.

The penal settlement at Moreton Bay was closed in 1839. From 1842, free settlers and convicts who had been pardoned were encouraged to take up land in the colony. The majority came from Britain and Europe. Many battles took place as Indigenous people resisted the intrusion and occupation of the land for which they had cared for thousands of years.

By the 1850s, the people of Moreton Bay were concerned that the government in Sydney was too far away. They began to call for the creation of a new colony, and petitioned the British Government to grant their request to separate from New South Wales. In 1859, Queen Victoria agreed and the new colony of Queensland was created with George Bowen as Governor.

At first, Queensland's Parliament was made up of 'pure merinos', the squatters who had claimed the land in the colony's hinterland. These men were appointed to the Parliament's Legislative Council by Governor Bowen. But, the squatters had rivals who competed for wealth and power. The plantation owners, cattle graziers and mine operators of central and northern Queensland considered their needs and interests to be different from those who governed them from Brisbane. They wanted to separate and form new colonies. Queensland was as large as Europe, and it was not practical or desirable that Brisbane should be the only link with the outside world.

Those in the north also had different ideas about migrant labour. The success of the sugar plantations of the north around Bundaberg, Mackay, Cairns and Townsville, depended on thousands of South Pacific Islanders who came to the colony as indentured workers. They were transported to the colony by the plantation owners, then paid at the end of their time and transported back to their islands. Many were swindled out of their already low wages and some died from disease or illness.

Gold was discovered in Queensland in 1858. Towns sprang up overnight as miners converged on the diggings, eager to stake their claim and make their fortunes. As gold became harder to find, frustration would boil over into riots. Restrictions were imposed so Chinese miners who also had joined the rush for prosperity, could not compete.

By the late 1880s, Queensland had become a significant Australian colony. Its main exports

included wool, gold, minerals, sugar and animal products. The colony had its own defence force and, in 1899, it sent soldiers to the Boer War in South Africa to help Britain. Its workers, too, had made great strides in their struggle for rights and representation in Parliament. A shearer's strike in 1891, and the economic depression in the 1890s, led to the formation of the Labor Party, a political party which formed government briefly in 1899.

Most Queenslanders were proudly British, but also valued their close ties to the other Australian colonies. They heeded the message of Henry Parkes in 1889 when he called for a Convention of leading Australians to draft a constitution for a national government. At the convention in 1891, two Queensland representatives, Samuel Griffith and John Macrossan, were important contributors to the first draft of the Australian Constitution.

But, the issue of Federation deeply divided Queensland. The colony did not participate in the Australasian Federal Conventions, which decided the final Constitution in 1897–98. Queensland's Parliament only agreed to a referendum on Federation in 1899, when it was clear that New South Wales would join Victoria, Tasmania and South Australia in federating. Those in north and central Queensland considered the effect Federation would have on their goal of separating from the south of the colony, while those in the south were threatened by the loss of intercolonial tariffs which had protected their industries. Queensland workers welcomed the restriction on non-European workers that Federation might bring. Others were concerned about how their interests would be represented in the Queensland Parliament, at the Federal Conventions and in the proposed Federal Parliament.

Queenslanders voted to approve the Australian Constitution in a referendum held on 2 September 1899. They were the most divided on the issue of Federation with the margin between the 'yes' and 'no' votes the narrowest of any of the Australian colonies. However, on 1 January 1901, Queenslanders across the State joined in celebrating the new nation.



Your tasks

For you to investigate

There are three themes for you to investigate. Each has information and activities to help you dig deeper into the story of Queensland's journey from colony to Federation.

People and Places

Investigate aspects of life in Queensland in the years before Federation, when there were many changes taking place in the colony.

Road to Federation

Investigate issues influencing Queenslanders' opinions on Federation, why there were different points of view, and the colony's final vote.

Celebrations and Futures

Investigate how Queensland celebrated Federation when it began, and how being part of the Australian Commonwealth continues to be celebrated today.