On 1 January 1901, Western Australia began a new part of its history – as one of the States in Australia’s new federal system. This was Commonwealth Day, when Australia was proclaimed a nation. All States would have a say in Federal Parliament’s leadership of the nation. They would have the Commonwealth’s protection if their security needed to be defended. And, Western Australia along with the other States would now be able to trade more easily with one another.

In Western Australia, as in the other States, it was a day of great celebration, both in the capital, Perth and in regional communities. Through street decorations, processions and special events, the celebrations highlighted the idea of nationhood – forging stronger relationships with the other States, and strengthened feelings of national pride.

At the same time, the celebrations also highlighted the ties many Australians had with Britain, and the part that British culture played in Western Australian life. The Australian nation was part of the British Empire and this was a source of great pride. For many Australians, the most exciting occasion in the first year of Federation was not Commonwealth Day, but a visit by the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall and York. They came to Australia to open the first Commonwealth Parliament in Melbourne on 9 May 1901.

However, celebrations of Federation involve more than just celebrating the nation as a whole and its place in the world. State identity is important too – the unique story that each State can weave from its individual history, the changes and developments that have shaped it, and how it sees its future. Western Australia has seen many changes and developments since 1901. Will these influence the way Western Australians celebrate Federation today and in the future?

**Investigations**

1. How was Federation celebrated in Perth?
2. How did Western Australians outside Perth celebrate Federation?
3. What was the significance of Federation for Western Australians?
4. How should Western Australians commemorate Federation now and into the future?
How was Federation celebrated in Perth?

On 2 January 1901, The West Australian newspaper reported on the excellence of Perth’s Federation celebrations of the previous day. It proudly declared that ‘for its size, no city in Australia more fittingly welcomed the proclamation of the new nation than the capital of the Golden West’.

There was a procession through the city, with prizes awarded for the best floats and decorations. Children were given free rides on the city’s electric trams. And, at Perth’s Esplanade Recreation Reserve, thousands of people gathered to hear the reading of the official Proclamation of the Commonwealth of Australia and a message from Queen Victoria.

Imagine the atmosphere in Perth on Commonwealth Day – the sights, the sounds! Imagine how much thought people must have put into the decorations and festivities to make them as fitting and memorable as possible.

Activities

1. In small groups, use a mind map to brainstorm what you would have expected to see in the celebrations in Perth on 1 January 1901. What aspects of Federation would have been celebrated? Imagine what the decorations would have looked like, including the colours you would have seen, the sounds you would have heard, and events that might have taken place.

2. The West Australian newspaper reported that prizes were awarded for the best decorations in Perth on 1 January 1901. Using the information on your mind map, create a set of general criteria that would have helped the judges make their decisions. What should the decorations include? How should they show what was special about Western Australia becoming part of Australia?

3. Share your group’s ideas with the rest of the class, and combine the criteria to create one set of criteria that the judges could have used. Agree on the number of points you would award each criterion.

4. In your groups, read the reports of ways in which the streets of central Perth were decorated. Using the set of criteria you created for the judges, decide how many points you would give to each street. Compare your scores with the rest of the class. Which street in Perth would have been awarded the prize of ‘Best Federation Street’?

5. Using the descriptions in the newspaper reports, choose one of the streets and draw a picture of what it looked like. Write a caption for it. Display the pictures around the classroom.
How did Western Australians outside Perth celebrate Federation?

The referendum of 1899 clearly showed that there were different views about the colony joining the Commonwealth of Australia. For example, the ‘yes’ vote in Perth was not as strong as the ‘yes’ vote on the eastern goldfields, and in some farming areas in the west the majority of voters said ‘no’ to Federation.

However, the referendum was part of a democratic process – citizens of the colony could disagree about the issue put to them for a vote, but they would all abide by the result. This was clear on 1 January 1901, when communities throughout Western Australia held celebrations welcoming the beginning of the Commonwealth of Australia, even if the area had not supported Federation originally.

Perth may have hosted the State’s biggest celebrations, but judging by the festivities in Western Australia’s rural towns and regional centres, Federation seemed to be popular everywhere!

Activities

1. In groups of four, read aloud the reports of celebrations in the towns around Western Australia.

2. Look at the referendum results for each town or region. From the result, what would you have thought people’s attitudes to Federation in each place might have been?

3. For each report, make a list of the kinds of people and community groups involved in organising the Federation celebrations. Why do you think they would want to be part of the celebrations?

4. Choose one of the four places described in the reports. Write a newspaper article or draw a cartoon, explaining the referendum result or the celebrations that took place. Speculate why people might have felt it was important to celebrate the democratic process of the referendum and join in the festivities even if they voted against Federation.

You will need

Resource sheet 2
- extracts: newspaper, about Federation celebrations around Western Australia
- data: referendum results
What was the significance of Federation for Western Australians?

Federation wasn’t seen as something to be celebrated just for a day or a year – its significance was greater than that. And so, some Western Australians who took part in the original celebrations also wanted to express their feelings in a more lasting way. One of these people was Julian Mitchell. He wrote a poem, entitled *Union*, about how he viewed Federation. It was published in *The West Australian* newspaper on 2 January 1901, along with reports of the State’s Commonwealth Day celebrations. When you read *Union* today, think about Julian Mitchell’s vision for the new nation and its future, and compare his views with the experiences and hopes of Australians more than a century later.

**Activities**

1. As a whole class, read the poem *Union* by Julian Mitchell. Use a dictionary to find the meaning of words you don’t know.
2. Consider the following questions.
   - How do we know this poem is about Australian Federation? What aspects of the poem refer to Federation?
   - What qualities about Federation does the poet admire?
   - What qualities about the people or nation does the poet have faith in?
   - Does your understanding of Federation match the poet’s? How does the poet want Federation remembered? Did it really happen the way the poem describes?
3. Work in pairs or groups to recite and/or act out each line of the poem. Different pairs or groups could take responsibility for different lines. You may also want to write music or use percussion or actions to accompany your recital of the poem.
4. Write a short verse to express your feelings about the six colonies uniting to form the nation of Australia. Express what kind of country you would like it to be in the future. Put all the poems together in a book for your class to share.

**Investigation 3**

You will need

- Resource sheet 3
- poem: *Union* by Julian Mitchell
How should Western Australians commemorate Federation now and into the future?

Federation was an important milestone in Australia’s and Western Australia’s history. Its significance has been commemorated in various ways over the years. In 2001, for example, to mark the Commonwealth’s one hundredth anniversary, the Australian Government issued special Centenary of Federation coins and stamps. However, we do not have a Federation monument or celebrate Federation as a special day, such as the national holidays of Australia Day and Anzac Day.

Use your knowledge and imagination to think of ways in which Western Australians could commemorate Federation – now and into the future. You might feel that the celebrations should have something in common with the celebrations that took place in 1901. Or, when you consider how Western Australia has changed and developed over more than a century, you might decide that celebrations should reflect new and different elements of the State’s identity and its place in the Australian nation.

Activities

1. Imagine your classroom has been put in charge of organising Federation Day, an event to be celebrated in every State and Territory of Australia on 1 January. You will be celebrating the creation of the nation and also what is special about each place in the nation.

As a class, brainstorm and write down your ideas about:

- How Australia has changed in the last hundred years – think about transportation, immigration, communication, music, food, the environment, population and achievements;
- How Western Australia has changed in the last hundred years;
- What is special about Australia;
- What is special about Western Australia; and
- How you would like Australia to be in the future.

2. In groups of four, pick a place in Western Australia (ensure each group picks a different place). Make plans for a Federation Day celebration. Give each team member a job according to their skills. Think about the following things.

   - What will your community celebrate about Australia’s Federation?
   - What symbols will you be using?
   - Will there be a Federation monument?
   - What important people will be invited?
   - Where will the celebration be held?
   - What events will take place?
   - What equipment will be needed?
   - What decorations will be used for the occasion?
   - What music and other performances will there be?

3. Present your plan to the rest of the class. You can do this in a number of ways, for instance:

   - Illustrated program/brochure inviting the public to the celebrations;
   - Report on how the celebrations will be organised and carried out; or
   - Digital presentation of your plan for the celebration.
Now that you have completed the investigations in Celebrations and Futures, use your knowledge to explore connections to your life today. Do one or more of the following activities.

1. In Australia’s democracy, elections are held every three years to choose members of parliament. Referendums are held whenever a change to the Constitution is proposed. For a change to be made, the majority of people and the majority of States must vote ‘yes’. Citizens might have different opinions and vote differently, but they abide by the majority’s decision. Design a poster or create a digital presentation, about the importance of this quality in a democracy. You might also try to find a name for this quality or value.

2. How important do you think local community groups and organisations are to your community? Use your local community paper or visit your Citizen’s Advice Bureau to research the work of your local community groups. Write a report or create a digital presentation of the work they do in your community. Add your own ideas of things that can be done to improve your community.

3. How can citizens contribute to a positive future for their nation? What values are important for a country’s wellbeing? Think of a new national holiday that celebrates good citizenship. Give it a name, and imagine how it could be celebrated across the country.
Perth’s Federation celebrations

**The Esplanade**

Hotel Esplanade: Queen’s portrait, draped with flags ... At the entrance to the Esplanade an arch was erected, consisting of a panelled and framed structure, bearing on the sides portraits in oils of Sir Henry Parkes, the father of Federation; Captain Cook ... Mr. Edmund Barton, the first Premier of Federated Australia; and Sir John Forrest, Premier for ten years of Western Australia. Above these were six shields representing the natural industries of the six federating States. Around the crown of the arch ran the Federal motto, “One nation, one flag, one people, one destiny.” To the right and left of the arch on the outside was a device bearing two hands joined, and the words “We’ll clasp.”

**St. George’s Terrace**

Government.—General Post Office, etc.; The central feature consisted of the shields of the six colonies ... the name of each colony was lettered in gold. In the centre was a large portrait of the Queen, with the single word “Empress” ... and right along the main front ran a scroll bearing the words, “Join we together for the people’s good.” On the right and left were allegorical paintings, the former depicting Western Australia, in the form of a richly attired female, drawn upon the waters in a coracle to which a small flock of black swans were harnessed, the prow of the vessel being directed towards its destination, the rising sun of the Commonwealth. The picture on the left represented Britannia and Western Australia clasping hands, with the lion on guard at their feet, and the kangaroo and emu and plants typical of the colony to the right and left ...

The decoration of the front of the “West Australian” building was designed to typify the amalgamation of the colonies ... Above the main entrance of the building stood a shield bearing the combined arms of the six federating colonies. This shield was surrounded with the ensigns of each colony supporting the banner which usage, but not right, has named “The Australian flag.”

*The West Australian*, 2 January 1901.
Hay Street

W. Zimpel’s: Tricolour drapes Union Jacks, and festoons of tricolour.

Foy and Gibson’s: Royal Standards and other flags, festoons of flags ...

Decorations Committee, at William street junction: Mottoes—“We’ll clasp hands,” “Ring out the old, ring in the new,” “By nature free, by seagirt blue,” “A new nation and a new century.”

... Konigstein and Co.: The parapet was draped and festooned with flags and tricolour. The shields of the six colonies were hung prominently and draped with flags. The Australian coat of arms surmounted panel bearing the motto, “Advance Australia,” and was draped with tricolour and flags of the six colonies ...

Fink’s Hotel: Tricolour flags and shields; Royal coat of arms; inscription “Advance United Australia.”

Norman’s Picture’s Gallery: Over the arched entrance the portrait of Her Majesty between ... draped Union Jacks.

Decorations Committee between William and Barrack streets: Mottoes “Britain rules the waves,” “63 years our beloved Queen,” “Loyalty to the Empire,” “Australia for Australians.” “Comrades in arms,” “God speed the union,” “Union is strength,” “God bless our Queen.”

At the Town Hall intersections: “One flag, one nation,” “One people, one destiny,” “Imperial federation,” “Rose, Thistle and Shamrock,” “Advance Australia,” “Awake and see thyself.”

Barrack Street

McNeils Buildings: Flags, unfurled and in festoons, tricolour festoons.

South British Chambers: Shields representing the federated colonies draped with flags, suspended from the front of the building; the Royal arms draped with flags, and beneath this “Prosperity to the Commonwealth.”

... Public Offices: Along the parapet, four heraldic shields of England, Ireland, Scotland, and West Australia, with the Royal Standard in the centre ...

Railway Hotel: “Success to the Commonwealth,” and flags ...

Decorations Committee [motto] “Australia the pride of Empire.”

The West Australian, 2 January 1901.
Federation celebrations around the State

**Fremantle**

Fremantle began on Monday evening to celebrate the foundation of the Australian Commonwealth and the opening of the new century. On that day a procession through the streets, followed by a concert on the Oval, constituted the programme. Yesterday the festival was continued ... Fremantle has seldom seen a more effective picture. Marching four and five abreast three thousand boys and girls of all sizes paraded some of the principal streets. Nearly everyone carried a small flag ... The children sang patriotic songs, and cheered and, of course, talked as they walked, whilst thousands of interested spectators looked on and returned the cheers.

**Northam**

The Commonwealth celebrations commenced here with midnight services conducted at various churches. Addresses suitable to the occasion were delivered. At half-past 9 a procession of children was marshalled at the Town Hall, under the superintendence of Mr. Reilly, chairman of the committee, and Mr. Dalton, Town Clerk. Being provided with flags and banners, the children presented a gay appearance as, headed by the Northam Brass Band, they marched to the station, where they were entrained for Burralong Pool, three miles distant. Mr. Reilly addressed them, explaining the meaning of the gathering, and calling for cheers for the Queen and the Commonwealth. On arrival at the grounds a programme of aquatic and other sports was entered into, great interest being centred in the competitions on the water ...

After a thoroughly enjoyable day had been spent the return journey was safely made. A “continental” concert was held during the evening on the recreation ground, short speeches being delivered by various prominent men on “The Day We Celebrate.”

*The West Australian*, 2 January 1901.
**Beverley**

The Commonwealth celebrations today were very successful. An athletic and aquatic sports meeting was held on the banks of the Avon. The council gave a picnic to the children, assisted by ladies, the funds being granted by the Government. The day was beautifully fine, though hot, and there was quite a representative gathering from all parts of the district. The proceedings were enlivened by the York Band, with an excellent programme of music.

**Geraldton**

Although this place exhibited strong anti-Bill predilections on Referendum Day, there was no lack of enthusiasm about to-day’s Commonwealth celebrations. Indeed, on no previous occasion has such warmth and unanimity of feeling been displayed here. The proceedings started with services at the various churches this morning ... a procession started from the railway station, and marched to the new Recreation Ground. At the head of the procession was Police-Inspector Holmes and mounted police, followed by the Geraldton Mounted Infantry; then came the Geraldton Volunteer Band and Geraldton Rifles; next followed about five hundred school children ... When the Recreation Ground was reached addresses were delivered by the Mayor ... and Resident Magistrate ... After the singing of ... the National Anthem the children were given lunch. In the afternoon sports were held, the attendance at the Recreation Ground being the largest ever known at Geraldton.

*The West Australian*, 2 January 1901.
Results of the Federation referendum

Record board of the Western Australian results for the Popular Referendum on Australian Federation, 31 July 1900, State Library of Western Australia, 009979PD.
UNION

The Commonwealth of Australia, Proclaimed Tuesday, January 1, 1901.
by Julian Mitchell

No angry menace of a hostile foe,
No blatant barking of a loud-mouthed gun,
No rush of shiv’ring fear, has made us one
Within our tide-borne ring of indigo;
But brothers spoke in brotherhood, and, lo!
The barriers fell, like mist before the sun,
And newly-wakened Love arose and spun
The strands which bind our fates for weal or woe.
God grant our Union peace, the pence that holds
Security. God grant us liberal moulds
In which to shape ourselves, and forge us strong,
Each one too proud to do the other wrong,
Each one too brave to lift a tyrant hand,
Each growing wiser as the years expand.

The West Australian, 2 January 1901.