

federation

Six colonies unite

On 1 January 1901, 250,000 people gathered in Centennial Park to witness the proclamation of the Federal Constitution, uniting six formerly independent colonies as one Commonwealth of Australia. The people of Sydney celebrated Federation with a week of festivities. A reception at the Domain for the Governor-General was followed by a military and official procession through the city to Centennial Park. The procession entered Centennial Park through Paddington Gates, elaborately decorated for the occasion.

The high point of the festivities was the ceremony in what is now known as Federation Valley, chosen because its rising slopes afforded the whole crowd good views. A 14-metre high octagonal, domed plaster pavilion was made for the ceremony. The pavilion was richly decorated with bas-relief castings of native flora and the imperial coat of arms. An enclosure with seating for 7,000 dignitaries and guests and 300 members of the press surrounded the pavilion. On the enclosure's outskirts, seating was provided for 10,000 school children and a 1,400 person choir.

After Queen Victoria's official proclamation had been read, Australia's first Governor-General, Lord Hopetoun, was sworn in. Federal ministers were then sworn in after a twenty-one gun salute. Singing by the massed choir concluded the ceremony.

Federation Pavilion

The plaster pavilion deteriorated rapidly and was removed from the Park in 1903. In 1904 the Commonwealth Stone which had been housed in the pavilion was placed on a sandstone pedestal surrounded by an iron picket fence. It remained there until the new Federation Pavilion was opened as part of Australia's bicentennial celebrations in 1988. The Pavilion is circular, representing unity, strength and a united cultural identity of the federated nation. Like the Park in which it sits, the Federation Pavilion is living heritage part of the daily recreational landscape of thousands of Australians.

The mosaic on the interior of the dome, by artist Imants Tillers, comprises of 1440 vitreous, enamelled-steel panels which reflect the concept of Federation. The mosaic's vast whiteness depicts the emptiness of inland Australia, while the colour spectrum portrays the many colours of our nation's landscape. Inscribed on a sandstone frieze are the words 'Mammon or Millennial Eden' paraphrasing the questions posed in Bernard O'Dowd's poem *Australia*:

A new demesne for Mammon to infest?

Or lurks Millennial Eden 'neath your face?

Centenary of Federation

Federation Valley was once again the focus of the nation when the Centenary of Federation celebrations were held on 1 January 2001. A capital works program was undertaken to prepare the area for this event. The program included major landscaping and regeneration of Federation Valley and repairing and restoring Federation Pavilion.

The works included the restoration of the mosaic. Other Federation projects included replanting Parkes Drive and creating the Avenue of Nations, a new entrance to the Park in line with the original vision for a grand western entry connecting Moore and Centennial Parks.

Cultural celebrations held for the centenary focused on the spirit of national unity. Though State capitals held their own civic events, Sydney and Centennial Park were the key sites for celebrations.

A grand parade of 8000 people including performing artists, marching bands, sports people, seniors, youth, dance groups and Indigenous and ethnic groups started at Circular Quay and travelled through the streets of Sydney to Centennial Park.

The parade was followed by a Federation ceremony attended by the Prime Minister, the Governor-General and all State Premiers. The day's festivities concluded with a concert in Centennial Park. These celebrations were broadcast live on television so that all Australians could share the experience.



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