

Our next celebration



For the Centenary of Federation, students at Renmark Primary are researching the life of the first Speaker of the House of Representatives. Portrait: Sir Frederick William Holder (1916) by George Webb (1861 - 1943), Historic Memorials Collection, Canberra - courtesy of the Parliament House Art Collection, Joint House Department, Canberra ACT.

When the last fireworks from the Olympic and Paralympic Games fade over Sydney, attention will turn to Australia's next big celebration - the Centenary of Federation on 1 January 2001. Planning is well advanced for major national celebrations that will be complemented by activities and projects at the community level.

The Parliamentary Education Office (PEO) is using the Centenary as an opportunity to help young Australians understand the origins of our federal system of government and to generate interest in learning about parliament. Already the PEO is facilitating a range of federation projects both within Parliament House and at the local community level.

A major initiative is the *First Parliament Project*, which involves students throughout Australia in researching the lives and careers of the first Members and Senators of the Australian Parliament. Working in class groups, students from 80 schools have been searching their local communities for information that will bring to life stories about their first Federal parliamentarians. Already there is an interesting yarn or two to tell.

In Queensland, students from Mt Gravatt School came across the former home of the first Federal Member for Oxley, Richard Edwards, when they were undertaking research on his life. When visiting the house for a photograph to include in

their project, the students were surprised to meet up with Mr Edwards's grandson, whose stories about his grandfather will now feature in their project.

Family connections have also helped students at Renmark Primary School in South Australia, who are researching the life of the first Speaker of the House of Representatives, Sir Frederick William Holder. The students have spoken with Sir Frederick's granddaughter and will use her insights to help build their story about their first Federal Member.

Students are being encouraged to use their projects locally, with presentations to other local schools, articles for their local newspapers and displays at local councils and libraries. The aim is to help give the Centenary of Federation a local connection and, therefore, make it more meaningful for individual communities.

The *First Parliament* projects will be launched on the PEO's web site (www.peo.gov.au) in November this year. The end product will be a rich tapestry of stories woven by young Australians nationwide.

The PEO is also conducting a series of role-play debates in Bendigo, Victoria, site of the 1898 conference of the Australian Natives Association and the birthplace of Sir John Quick. The conference, with Quick's influence, is believed to have helped tip the debate in Victoria towards support for federation. At the Corowa Convention in 1893, Sir John Quick introduced the concept of opening the federation debate to the people.

The PEO role-play debates are part of the Bendigo Federation Celebrations, funded by the Victorian Federation grants scheme, and will be held from 16 to 20 October 2000. Year 9 students will debate the historic Immigration Bill (No 17) 1901 in the Federation Room of the Shamrock Hotel, the very place where Deakin and Quick excited the Australian Natives Association and the people of Bendigo in 1898 to vote YES in the June 1898 referendum. The students will be acting as Members of the first Federal Parliament. Local actors will help to set the scene with a play about Sir John Quick and Bendigo's involvement in the federation movement. Meanwhile Year 6 students will be enacting a Bendigo Council meeting in the Old Town Hall, the very place that the Council met in the years around 1898. These students, acting as local councillors, will be debating a motion that the Council support the YES vote in the referendum of June 1898.

"Our Centenary of Federation projects are all about helping young Australians appreciate the events of 100 years ago and understand why they are still relevant today," says Brenton Holmes, Director of the Parliamentary Education Office. "Importantly, they are projects that focus on local communities and the role that those communities played in bringing about a united Australian nation."

"The message we are delivering with our projects is that through involvement in their local communities young Australians can have a say in shaping the future of our nation."

For further information on the Centenary of Federation projects being conducted by the Parliamentary Education Office

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