

**~ BIOGRAPHIES ~****Sir Henry Parkes (1815-1896)**

The appearance of colonial statesman Sir Henry Parkes on the new \$5 note marks the return to circulation of this distinguished politician, dubbed the ‘Father of Federation’, who was once a household name.

Parkes was described during his lifetime by The Times of London as ‘the most commanding figure in Australian politics’. He was a political survivor, evidenced by the fact that he was premier of colonial New South Wales five times between 1872 and 1891. His political life spanned the second half of the nineteenth century, from the establishment of responsible self government in 1856, which was followed by the era of faction politics characterised by shifting alliances, through to the advent of the party system. He was knighted in 1877.

Born in Warwickshire, England, in 1815, Parkes became a bone and ivory turner, a skilled artisan, and emigrated to NSW in 1839. He drifted into journalism after fitful progress in his trade. His literary and political writings belied his lack of formal education. While in England he had taken up the cause of political radicalism and coming to the colony continued his interest in politics. He campaigned for universal male suffrage and in 1848 played a prominent role in the campaign against the resumption of convict transportation to New South Wales. From 1850 to 1858 he was editor and proprietor of The Empire newspaper, an organ of liberal opinion.

Parkes won a seat in the Legislative Council at the elections of 1854 and two years later he was elected to the newly established Legislative Assembly in the first Parliament under responsible self government.

Parkes’ legislative and secular reforms in education, particularly the 1880 Public Instruction Act which strengthened the state education system, were controversial and aroused sectarian discord.

In 1887, in anticipation of the forthcoming Centennial celebrations, Parkes unsuccessfully sought to have NSW renamed Australia. This act was typical of Parkes’ one-upmanship over his political rivals and counterparts from the other colonies.

He was, however, accorded the epithet ‘Father of Federation’ for his leadership in advancing the cause for nationhood during the last decade of his life. On 24 October 1889 at a reception in his honour at the Tenterfield School of Arts, Parkes delivered an address to his former constituents that was a clarion call for Federation. In this landmark speech, which has come to be known as the Tenterfield Oration, he declared that the time was right for a convention of representatives from all the colonies to be convened ‘to devise the constitution which would be necessary for bringing into existence a federal government with a federal parliament for the conduct of national undertaking’.

Parkes convened the 1890 Federation Conference in Melbourne as a precursor to the 1891 National Australasian Convention in Sydney, where the first draft Bill of the Constitution was written. It was also there that he proposed the name 'Commonwealth' for the unified colonies, a name that carried through to the final draft at the 1897-98 Australasian Federal Convention, which he did not live to see.

Parkes died at his home 'Kenilworth' in the Sydney suburb of Annandale on 27 April 1896, and was buried at Faulconbridge in the Blue Mountains. Thrice married, his first and second wives had predeceased him. He was survived by his third wife, Julia, and numerous children from the marriages.

One of Parkes' many legacies to the citizens of New South Wales was Centennial Park, a fitting site for the proclamation of the Commonwealth of Australia on 1 January 1901.

Memorials to Sir Henry Parkes include the suburb of Parkes in Canberra which is home to the Federal Parliament. The central western New South Wales township of Parkes is also named in honour of him. On the 100th anniversary of his death, the Royal Australian Mint launched a general circulation \$1 coin to commemorate him 'officially' as 'Father of Federation'.

The personal papers of Sir Henry Parkes, including his voluminous correspondence, are held in the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales. They constitute one of the premier documentary collections of Australia's political heritage.

### **Catherine Helen Spence (1825-1910)**

Catherine Helen Spence, journalist, social reformer and novelist, was the leading woman in public affairs at the turn of the century in Australia. She was in the vanguard of first-wave feminism seeking equality of opportunity for women in this country, and was lauded as the 'Grand Old Woman of Australia'. From the pulpit to the platform, she championed the rights of women, lobbied for greater child welfare provision, and argued for a more democratic electoral system.

Spence was born in Melrose, Scotland, in 1825. She emigrated to South Australia at the age of 14 with her parents and siblings and initially worked as a governess and briefly ran a small private school.

Nurturing literary ambitions since childhood, in her mid-twenties Spence began occasional paid journalism, a career which became long and distinguished. Her clear, wide-ranging articles were mainly on literature, politics and social issues. She is credited as the first woman novelist in Australia to portray antipodean issues with the publication in 1854 of her first novel, *Clara Morison: A Tale of South Australia During the Gold Fever*. The plots and characters of this novel and subsequent ones drew on her own experiences and circle of associates.

Around 1856, Spence converted from the Presbyterianism of her upbringing to Unitarianism. She became South Australia's first woman preacher when she delivered a sermon to the Adelaide congregation in 1878.

Spence's faith imbued her philanthropic endeavours. In 1872, she had co-founded the Boarding-Out Society, a voluntary organisation which superintended the fostering-out of state dependent children. She alternated between the offices of Honorary Treasurer and Honorary Secretary from 1872 until 1886. The next year the Society's functions were taken over by the new State Children's Council. She was an active member of the Council from its inception until just before her death. In 1897 she was the first woman appointed to the Colony's Destitute Board, commissioned in 1849 to alleviate poverty.

An advocate of public education, in 1877 she was appointed to a local school board and supported the establishment in 1879 of the first government secondary school, the Advanced School for Girls. A year later, the South Australian Education Department published her book *The Laws We Live Under*. This textbook broke new ground by outlining citizens' rights and responsibilities. It foreshadowed the introduction of courses on civics and legal studies in curricula across the country throughout the twentieth century.

Her interest in electoral reform was sparked in 1859 by an article on the Thomas Hare system of proportional representation, by the English social philosopher John Stuart Mill. She became an inveterate pamphleteer on the topic of proportional representation and in 1892 she proposed a modified version. Three years later she formed the Effective Voting League of South Australia and campaigned for the introduction of the scheme into the Colony's electoral system.

In 1891 Spence joined the growing movement to secure the vote for women and became a Vice-President of the Women's Suffrage League. She pushed the suffragists' claims during her electoral reform campaign and throughout her 1893-94 lecture tour of the United States and Britain. She returned in December 1894 to witness the historic passing of the Constitution Amendment Bill through Parliament giving voting rights to the women of South Australia, the first Australian colony to do so.

Spence became Australia's first female political candidate when she contested, unsuccessfully, the election for delegates to the 1897 Australasian Federal Convention. She had campaigned on the single issue of proportional representation.

In 1909, Spence presided over the formation of the Women's Non-Party Political Association, which later became the League of Women Voters of South Australia.

Catherine Helen Spence died on 3 April 1910 in Norwood, Adelaide, while working on her autobiography, published posthumously later that year. She never married.

The Catherine Helen Spence Scholarship was established by the South Australian Government in 1911 to perpetuate her memory. It is generally awarded every four years to a South Australian woman to study social problems in Australia and abroad. The next scholarship will be offered in 2001.

In 1999, a plaque honouring Spence's achievements was installed at her Scottish birthplace.

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