HENRY PARKES FOUNDATION

THE HENRY PARKES ORATION 2021

"One people, one destiny" – or is it now eight or nine?

Reflections on the life of Henry Parkes, and Federation in the time of COVID-19

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Sleeping in the same bedroom as the man who would become the Father of Federation, my days begin descending the steep staircase with its well gripped cedar rail and putting my hand up to touch the upper landing, steadying myself before taking the final sharp curve to the left and the ground floor of Werrington House.

One hundred and forty years after Henry Parkes and his first wife Clarinda – and their children – left Werrington House, my wife Jennine and I arrived as the new owners. We arrived with the same sense of wonderment and opportunity as they did. Built by the youngest daughter of Australia's first home-grown vice-regal family Mary King and her husband Robert Copeland Lethbridge in 1829, Werrington was then an imposing country house well constructed by convict labour and intended to make a lasting statement by its original owners both from Cornwall.

It came with serious acreage granted by Mary King's father, NSW Governor Phillip Gidley King himself, in a parting generous gesture to his own family when he was handing over to his controversial successor Governor William Bligh. Each endowed their families with 2000 acres divided by what is now the main Western rail line in Sydney. Even then – with a whole continent to be subdivided by Crown grants and no thought of native title – these allocations were frowned upon.

For Henry and Clarinda though, controversy over property would be endemic but Werrington House was a giant step up compared to their first experience in what are now the outer Western Suburbs of Greater Sydney.

Early days in Sydney – times of misery and hardship

Within months of arrival in Sydney and in search of employment, they had gone to live at what is now Regentville on the southern side of Penrith. Parkes had taken a position on the model farm established by Sir John Jamison described as an affable old Irishman and doctor, who inherited well from his father who had been a First Fleet surgeon.

But while it paid £30 a year and rations, it was a time of misery and hardship for both husband and wife. Writing to his sister Sarah, Parkes described their food ration as "sometimes unfit to eat" and there simply wasn't enough, and to add to their plight they had a tiny baby, Menie. His duties saw him wash sheep in the Nepean River, bring in the wheat, and share some of the work done by convicts.

Through a bitterly cold winter, they lived in a shed with a door as their bed. Parkes had begun as a farm boy back in Warwickshire, but was not cut out for this hard labour in his chosen New World. They lasted six months before heading back into Sydney.

Meant for greater things

Henry was meant for greater things; and even being a uniformed, bottom-rung Customs officer was a massive improvement, a job that kept him busy for the next five years.

Parkes used his time in Customs to plan his next step. His role as a minor functionary dealing with ships' crews saw him put together a nice collection of knick-knacks from all over the South Pacific.

In 1846, he put these up for sale and used the £100 proceeds to rent a shop in Hunter Street, Sydney; to acquire a lathe to make goods; and to restock with toys and crockery – even rather futuristically importing from Hong Kong.

In the retail world – like the political world – Henry Parkes had a very broad horizon. The location of the shop was also ideal for what we call today 'networking'. Coincidentally, my first and-50 years later-last offices in the city were also in Hunter Street.

Real estate then as now dominated much of political conversation in Sydney. The terminology may have changed but the issues remain the same: how much was enough for big landowners? Crown grants were at the behest of the Governor of the day, so those who could best pander to, or cajole, or threaten came out the financial winners. And it had been this way since the First Fleet dropped anchor in Port Jackson in 1788. Squatters like the Macarthurs and Wentworth already wielded power thanks to substantial early land grants. While such self-enrichment was a lightning rod for public criticism, there is no early evidence that Parkes was ever interested in property wealth. Parkes was too preoccupied by the accumulation of intellectual wealth: he saw himself as a poet and man of letters. As biographer Robert Travers put it, "He devoured words with the gusto of a boy swallowing hot buttered buns."

He became actively interested in reform and was attracted to the Chartists who sought political representation which was not based purely on wealth, land holdings and delegated power. They also opposed cheap labour offered by Chinese, Indian, and Pacific Island workers, who looked like a very convenient way for large land holders to increase their fortunes. In today's terms, Chartists were on the left of the political spectrum, but were also grounded by what they needed to do to make a decent living. Just as the concept of Indigenous land rights was unheard of, so too was Multiculturalism. Self preservation and self-interest prevailed. Interestingly too, New South Wales was coming to resent convict transportation from Britain, just as America had.

Shopkeeper Parkes threw has weight and energy behind Oxford educated barrister Robert Lowe, and, working as his campaign manager, secured his election to the infant NSW Legislative Council.

The dark art of politics beckons

This electoral success was just a taste. Parkes became more emmeshed by the day with the dark art of politics. His problem was the one that he would carry for life: money.

There was a property qualification of £2000 to be an eligible candidate[1] and Parkes came nowhere near having it, and had to content himself to seeing others elected.

Next he worked tirelessly to see Dr John Dunmore Lang elected to fill a casual vacancy in the Legislative Council. In 1850, Lang was radical for his time; a proud republican; a federalist who wanted the colonies to band together free of Britain; and, a frequent visitor to Parkes' Hunter Street toy shop. Parkes liked these ideas but drew the line at anything that could be branded socialism.

[1] Update to speech as delivered: The franchise in NSW was limited to men with property valued at £200 freehold (not £2000), or paying rent of £20 per year. Parkes had organised a public meeting for franchise reform in 1849, with a petition calling for the qualifications to be reduced to £50 and £10 respectively.

On the business side, Henry set up a branch of his store in Geelong with a prosperous Port Phillip pushing hard for separation from NSW. A poor choice of manager, and sloppy paperwork by Parkes himself saw that business expansion falter and quickly fold.

Newspaper publisher

Undeterred, for Henry Parkes, it was simply a case of On with the Next Idea! Within months of his failed Melbourne foray, he decided to go into the newspaper business and by Christmas 1850 was the proud publisher of *The Empire*. The Packers were not the first to go after the Rivers of Gold carved out by John Fairfax with the publication of the *Sydney Morning Herald* in 1831: it was the Warwickshire farm boy turned shop owner, Henry Parkes. Twelve years after first setting foot in Sydney without a job or lodgings to go to, Parkes now had a voice. He was determined to make that voice heard.

The Empire found a market in many ways similar to the *Daily Telegraph* today. Whereas the *Sydney Morning Herald* was the journal of record at the Australian Club and among the well to do, Parkes' paper was aimed at people who, like him, were tradesmen and interested in self education.

It paid its way through advertising and government notices and sold initially for six pence a copy but – after a few weeks at that hefty price – dropped to three pence a copy and became a daily. He was off and running as owner, publisher and editor of his own daily newspaper in the young colony.

What more could a 35-year-old entrepreneur ask for? In a word, 'money'. The shop in Hunter Street was sold in early 1852 but that wasn't enough. Just one year after launch, the paper had cost him £6000, and a desperate Parkes scrambled to retrieve bad debts, which he did sufficiently to recover his public platform and livelihood – a close call at a time when gold had become the public's obsession.

The Gold Rush on both sides of the Pacific – California and New South Wales – turbocharged business development and saw the end to convict transportation to NSW and the proclamation of Victoria as a separate colony.

Parkes looked down on Gold Fever and made this clear in his editorials, but it also hit him in the pocket and sales fell. His self-made status and power as a newspaper owner made him a force to be reckoned with. It gave him political legitimacy and leverage. Business pressure notwithstanding,

Parkes was finally within striking distance to establish his own career in Parliament.

Aspiring politician

His first attempt to be elected to the NSW Legislative Council in 1852 failed, but gave him valuable practice for the epic battle which occurred in the following year. The legendary William Charles Wentworth – yes, he of Blaxland, Wentworth and Lawson, who first crossed the Blue Mountains to open the vast golden interior of the continent – and the relative newcomer who would become Australia's Father of Federation were pitted against each other in 1853. For Wentworth, his medium was the Legislative Council; for Parkes, his own popular newspaper *The Empire*.

At issue was a future Constitution for NSW, drafted by Wentworth, which sought to entrench the propertied class and – true to British tradition – even sought to bestow hereditary colonial peerages on the 'good and great'. While the bicameral system proposed might have passed muster, the Bunyip Aristocracy made a tantalising target for Parkes and he gave a witheringly effective address at the Royal Victoria Theatre, claiming his place on the political stage.

But rowdy and entertaining as it was, it did not have any impact on the passage of the Constitution Bill, whose privileges – minus the peerages – went largely unchanged. The Squire of Vaucluse had won the battle.

However, Parkes found himself soon embroiled in a printer's strike at *The Empire*. Men, some of whom he had paid to emigrate from Britain, walked off the job, forcing him to revert to doing the editing and layout himself, while at the same time a newly born daughter Lily Maria lay dying of an infant disease. While the strikers were publicly condemned and prosecuted successfully by the NSW Attorney General

himself, this was no compensation for the loss of a child who he barely got to see. Some said he never forgot the experience, and it even framed his view of the working class thereafter.

Ever the pragmatist, he set aside his British-only employment practice to fill vacancies with Indian printers from Madras – with British fathers of course!

But good fortune often follows bad, and in April came the opportunity he had waited for: a casual vacancy in the Legislative Council. Parkes took his seat in 1854. He stood firmly on the first rung of what would be a Life in Politics.

Into parliament

The Honourable Henry Parkes MC (the then post-nominal) arrived in Australia's first Parliament at a pivotal moment. The Constitution Bill promoted by Wentworth had been dutifully sent off to London for debate in Westminster and then Royal Assent. This meant that the original NSW Legislative Council was joined by a new Legislative Assembly in 1856 for which many thought Parkes would be an obvious candidate.

So when Henry announced at the end of 1855 (just 18 months in the Council) that he would resign, it came as no great surprise. But what did come as a total shock was his announcement that he would never again stand for ANY elected office!

This remains one of the unsolved mysteries of Parkes turbulent and extraordinary life. It was completely out of character for someone so ambitious, and who had laboured relentlessly for a strong media presence and elected office, to abruptly jettison these.

Explanations centre around money problems: *The Empire* was costing Parkes an absolute fortune but was vital to his political ascent. The workload of being an editor, and whatever else his paper demanded, took a physical and mental toll even for a workaholic which he undoubtedly was. But as the definitive biography by Stephen Dando-Collins concluded: "As 1855 came to an end, so too, it seemed, had Henry Parkes' dream of a career in politics."

We are left to wonder whether this was just an attention-grabbing ruse. That was December, but on 7 January 1856, Parkes announced his candidature for the inaugural Legislative Assembly, where he would run on a four-man ticket nicknamed 'the Bunch'.

And on 13 March 'the Bunch' were all elected to the NSW Parliament, so Henry was back in the ring.

These were early days before the advent of political parties with written platforms and defined ideologies. They saw the ebb-and-flow of personality-based groupings and of course financial clout carried weight as always. The first 16 months saw three governments come and go – it was hardly an inspiring start. Parkes sat on the Opposition benches, unpaid, as was the case for our first MPs unless and until they became Ministers! He therefore had plenty of time to think about the steady accumulation of debt run up by his daily newspaper, one of whose creditors was the very wealthy Speaker (and 'Bunch' supporter) Sir Daniel Cooper.

Debts claim *The Empire*

Imagine the consternation of the Speaker as he read the resignation letter of his colleague Parkes to a stunned House. A domino effect of debt forced Henry to resign in a story so typical of the emerging city of Sydney: the very wealthy Cooper was building his grand mansion at Point Piper called Woollahra House and had a serious cost overrun, forcing him to call up debts. Parkes' was one of those, and when confronted with financial reality, he had to admit that *The Empire* was hopelessly in debt. He had been delusional about its value; and totally neglectful of its running costs. But it had elevated him to this point and he didn't want to let it go – its circulation was neck-and-neck with the *Herald*. Be that as it may, said Cooper, he had to call in the debt.

This rendered Parkes insolvent; and a bankrupt couldn't sit in Parliament. Cooper took possession, and the sun was about to set on *The Empire*. Parkes laid bare his insolvency in an editorial farewell to

readers. Amazingly, the public response was so strong – matched by an upswing in subscriptions – that the paper was saved, current debts were paid, and *The Empire* showed a modest profit for the first time ever!

All of that was fine, but Henry Parkes – in just three years – was now a former Member of both Houses in the fledgling Parliament of NSW. Saved by newspaper subscriptions in January 1857; it took a couple of failed attempts before we saw Parkes back in the Parliamentary ring just one year later on 29 January 1858. It is interesting to note the fluidity, almost informality, of Members coming and going in the early Parliament.

But it was too good to be true, by September 1858 it was all over for Parkes' *Empire*. Undoubtedly, it gave Fairfax great satisfaction and relief to publish *The Empire*'s accumulated debts of £50,000 in their Insolvency Court listings – in today's money, Parkes owed roughly $18 million and there was no way back from this. *The Empire* was sold for £10,000 [to Samuel Bennett (of the *Herald*) and William Hanson (the Government Printer!). Its firebrand days were over]. While creditors lost much of their money, there was also a sense that Sydney had lost a strong and very vocal media alternative to the *Herald*.

Hard times

Not only had Henry failed to repay loans, he had failed to pay the rent on 'Helene', the Ryde home that housed has growing family. Days after the collapse of *The Empire*, Henry and Clarinda along with five children were evicted. They took up temporary lodgings in a nearby coach house and stables.

His seat in Parliament was also part of the price he paid – his third resignation - and records show the Parkes family down to their last couple of pounds. Bizarrely and somewhat desperately, Henry decided that he should become a lawyer – much to the amusement of certain lawyers he told.

He found money for legal texts, began reading them, stopped drinking, and even purchased a barrister's wig in anticipation of his imagined admission! He saw out 1858, struggling with his legal studies and realising that becoming a lawyer was much harder than he thought.

He was offered, but declined, a government paid position as Collector of Customs, indicating continuing public interest in him and sympathy for his plight. He would survive the impending bankruptcy proceedings that year, although the stigma of undischarged bankrupt remained.

With a general election due in May 1859, Henry again threw his hat in the ring as his admirers and detractors alike anticipated and was re-elected to the Parliament representing East Sydney.

To feed his family, he started writing again, not for *The Empire*, but the *Herald*! Still no Ministry, no salary. From the Opposition benches, Parkes championed the formation of a local (volunteer) military force to protect Australia in the event that Britain might redeploy its' Australian Garrison to meet emergencies elsewhere. He proposed a military and naval force made up of permanent and reserve members. While an amended motion was carried, no action was taken to implement it. He also showed active interest in education, the principle of free trade, and the potential of that new technology, railways. He chaired a committee investigating 'Conditions of the Working Class', and one on prison conditions. He regularly referred to recent initiatives taken in the United States.

In mid-1860, proceedings in the Insolvency Court ended with final settlement and modest payments to creditors.

Werrington House

Having weathered so many storms in his first 45 years, and despite the lack of a ministerial salary, Parkes decided in 1860 that it was time to do something befitting his station in life and which would benefit his growing family.

He spotted a newspaper advertisement offering Werrington House for lease. Built in 1829 by Mary King and Robert Copeland Lethbridge, and dominating substantial farmland from its elevated position, for Parkes it made such a statement.

Situated 55 km from Sydney, it was then very much a country house whose land stretched between the towns of St Marys and Penrith. My wife Jennine and I bought Werrington House, now on five acres, in 2011 and have meticulously restored and improved it over the last decade.

A two-storey, colonial sandstone house built on the spot chosen by Governor King himself (now landmarked by a totemic Bunya tree), this was an English country mansion that Parkes could only have dreamt of as a Warwickshire farmboy. And here he could have it all for an affordable £110 a year, which he was bringing in from the *Herald* alone. The self-sufficiency offered by Werrington was a great relief and respite to the family.

It was Clarinda who came into her own at Werrington, she took to the farm life with newfound enthusiasm. She put together the necessary farm animals: chickens, sheep, cows, pigs – the ducks flew in and out of the pond as they still do. The children thrived and were healthier, but they certainly had their chores to attend to in order to make it work. The convict labour which had built and first staffed Werrington was already long gone.

Nonetheless Henry was able to proudly claim: "We already bake our own bread and make our own butter, and we intend to grow our own corn and kill our own beef and mutton."

Into this family-sized utopia, Parkes revived his interest of collecting animals, which had been very much constrained by all previous homes. Birds abounded at Werrington: cockatoos, lorikeets, kookaburras, ducks, cranes, herons, cormorants and a pelican. In many ways, Werrington served as a prototype for Parkes' vision for a Sydney Zoo, and it included not only kangaroos, emus and wombats, but even antelope and monkeys! Perhaps the greatest image of Henry's love of animals is when, fearing a bushranger at large, the family took refuge in the adjoining kitchen building, and Henry opened the sturdy door clutching a koala!

But into this idyllic setting, the realities of political life intruded. Today, Werrington House is just under an hour from the Sydney CBD but, in 1860, it took the best part of a day to commute, even though the rail service linked Sydney to Parramatta in 1855. So when Parliament sat, Parkes had to be in Sydney all week, making Werrington his weekend refuge for much of the year. Family communication was, like at Ryde, often by mail, and this meant that increasingly Clarinda and the family had to fend for themselves.

Tour to the old country

But as if Parliamentary duties were not enough of a cause for Henry's frequent absence from his family at Werrington, worse was to come. In 1861, Premier Sir Charles Cowper – who correctly saw Parkes as a threat on the Opposition benches – approved what today we would call a trade mission to Britain to promote immigration to NSW. Another rival, John Robertson, made the offer to Parkes who snatched the prospect of being a paid 'Commissioner of Emigration' with an all-expenses-paid triumphant return to his country of origin. The family would just have to soldier on at Werrington in his (protracted) absence.

The whole idea had been Henry's: he had proposed this to Parliament no doubt expecting that he would be appointed as one of the two Commissioners. Whether Clarinda was ever consulted about this is not on the public record. Astonishingly, approved by Parliament at the end of April; appointed on 11 May; Henry left on 21 May- this was a century before real international travel! Even by today's standards, this speed of turnaround was extraordinary. A Man on a Mission – with plenty happy to see him go.

Just three days before departure, Henry took his 18-year-old son Robert into Sydney to get affairs in order for his absence – life insurance, his will, creditors meetings, and just a £63 bank deposit to keep his family going at Werrington until a *Herald* correspondent fee kicked in several months later. While Henry set off to network with a condescending and disinterested British political class, his family struggled to put bread on the table back in Sydney. During his prolonged absence, the *Herald* turned

against him, saying the mission was a wasteful extravagance which had not netted a single migrant from the old country.

Parkes thought he was on a good thing and wanted it extended by another year! His long-suffering wife, nurturing another newborn daughter, had written saying she couldn't keep things going, he had to return for the family.

When the self-absorbed Parkes returned home to Werrington on 23 January 1863, his remarkably unselfish family were thrilled and relieved to see him. [Except for the beard he returned with].

The other surprise for him to announce was that he had borrowed another £2000 in the new business name of H. Parkes & Co to set up the forerunner of a modern department store – oh yes, and he had already spent it on stock!

News of this venture infuriated previous cleaned-out creditors; but this didn't worry Henry, who also wanted to be back in Parliament. He failed in Maitland in August; so on to Braidwood in January 1864; that failed too, so on to Kiama in April.

Back in parliament

He won Kiama, so was back in Parliament, Again. But in pace with his galloping political comeback, was his new business debt. He had managed to turn this enterprise from a £2000 deficit into £7000. His British goods supply was stopped; his mark-ups made goods unsellable; and there was a recession in the colony.

Parkes sat poker faced and defiant in the NSW Parliament attacking the government for its financial ineptitude while hoping they didn't find out about his own latest business disaster.

Two more governments came and went until, finally Parkes was made Colonial Secretary in the government of James Martin in 1865.[2] This put him in charge of schools, hospitals, railways, police, and the militia – a sort of super-ministry. But for the first time in Parliament, he would be paid, and well paid at £2000 a year. He immediately sought to put the 'department store' at arm's length. There was finally serious nation-building work to do, and he now had the political authority to do it.

Being in government is what politics is all about – putting in place long-held dreams, resolving problems, setting new directions. Parkes thrived in this role and proved himself both capable and visionary. He made astute appointments who – over time – made their own contribution to the betterment of NSW. One of his proudest legacies was his Public Schools Act which saw the establishment of state schools for all the children of NSW, run by properly trained teachers. Teacher training and curriculum were to be state controlled. The Catholic Church railed against Parkes' legislation which they saw as a take-over which would limit their religious freedom.

In health – and Sydney then had only ONE public hospital (Sydney Infirmary) – Parkes was determined to raise standards by requiring inspection of any hospital or other institution including the asylum. Having read of Florence Nightingale's heroic care for British soldiers wounded in the Crimean War, Parkes wrote to her proposing that she send a small training team to Sydney to establish nursing in Australia. The legendary Nightingale did so, acknowledging that the plan was both wise and benevolent. (I showed similar support for nurses with professional rates of pay, the first Chief Nursing Officer of NSW, and the new Nursing Act of 1990.)

Free trade was a passionate cause for Parkes. Addressing a dinner in his honour in Melbourne in May 1867, Parkes attacked the very existence of customs houses dotted along the Murray River separating NSW and its offshoot Victoria. Customs duties between states were a disincentive to trade. But he went on to say, "The time has arrived when these colonies should be united by some federal bond of connection." This was Parkes first call for federalism and was both well-received and newsworthy around the colonies.

He suggested a Federal Council to look at issues such as customs duties and steamship operations.

[2] Appointed 22 January 1866

These good years ended in 1868 after a personal falling out with Premier James Martin, who had supported the sacking of the Customs Collector, William Duncan, an old associate of Parkes going back to the days of the Hunter Street shop. Against the advice and wishes of his Parliamentary friends, Henry resigned as Colonial Secretary. His eye was on the Premiership, but it proved to be an expensive miscalculation and setback. Martin resigned his Ministry weeks later, but it was John Robertson – not Henry – who replaced him as Premier. And there was no Ministry for Parkes, nor was there a salary. The same with the succeeding Cowper Government.

What time all of this left for overseeing 'H. Parkes & Co', the luxury goods store, was negligible. The sobering £7000 debt of 1865 had exploded into the £36,000 catastrophe of 1871 – a $10 million loss in today's money. Again, Parkes had to resign (Kiama) from Parliament and file for bankruptcy. After another 18 months back in the Insolvency Court, and with no savings to fall back on, the curtain came down on the Parkes' family at Werrington House, where they had fallen behind in rent.

Henry sold much of his beloved (and valuable) library to provide some cash in hand. Their refuge was Lansdowne, a former inn, purchased by devoted supporters who also bought the contents of Werrington House – but wisely in Clarinda's name! Not Henry's.

The top job at last

'More returns than Melba' is an Australian expression that should have been reserved for Henry Parkes. Discharged from bankruptcy, he was back in Parliament in January 1872 (Mudgee this time) and positioning for the Premiership. At 57 years of age, Parkes was sworn in as Premier of NSW, beginning "the most stable period in the government of NSW since the inception of a local parliament." (S. Dando-Collins). The Top Job at last (another Australianism rarely used elsewhere). His government arrived as the economy was booming mostly due to property turnover and he went on a very popular 'whistle-stop' tour of NSW, so acclaimed that the central west town of Bushman's adopted the name of the new Premier, Parkes.

He was smart at promoting the odd rival out of politics: former Premier James Martin became Chief Justice Martin. His loss of government in 1875 was mercifully not over money, but because of the Premier's defence of the then NSW Governor in releasing a notorious prisoner, bushranger Frank Gardiner. Parkes didn't take loss of the Premiership well, the loss of adulation, the ability to wield power – not unlike unseated Prime Ministers today! But there were two consolations that year: a knighthood (KCMG) was in the offing; and a land grant of 600 acres at Springwood, which Henry would call Faulconbridge.

Back in Opposition, Henry quickly burned through his modest savings and reverted to borrowing to survive. A book of his speeches was the only other real distraction until, in March 1877, the Governor he had defended called on him to form a new government which lasted only until August that year. With his knighthood conferred in the middle of his second government (in May), along with his newly knighted replacement John Robertson, both were defeated in the subsequent 1877 election. Suddenly 62-year-old Sir Henry looked very much yesterday's man, a politician whose use-by date was up.

Parkes concentrated on a building program at Faulconbridge and a home at Mt Victoria further up the Mountains for his beloved eldest Menie, whose clergyman husband, William Thom, had died tragically from injuries in a carriage accident. This left Menie a widow and homeless, aged 38, with five young children.

Arch-rival Robertson gave way to Parkes in 1878, throwing his numbers behind Parkes, thus making him Leader of the Opposition, and by year's end Parkes was called upon to form his third government. He rewarded his nemesis Robertson with President of the Legislative Council: in politics, keep your friends close, and your enemies closer. Thus began a period of serious reform unseen previously in Macquarie Street.

Key reforms

The third Parkes administration, in which the Premier also took the key portfolio of Colonial Secretary, recaptured the energy of the first and saw:

- compulsory education for all children 6-16 years of age
- a foster home system to improve the lives of orphans
- our first copyright laws to protect authors and inventors
- professional stipendiary magistrate to replace honorary JPs
- improved water and sewerage both Sydney and country
- a medical school for Sydney
- a completely revised and fairer Electoral Act
- funding for the Sydney International Exhibition of 1879.

Any one of these initiatives could be the subject of this whole address, but as the longest-serving Minister for the Arts (not also to be Premier simultaneously), and as the President of the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, l want to concentrate on the last of these to illustrate the impact of Henry Parkes: the Sydney International Exhibition in the vast Garden Palace built in the Botanical Gardens. And let me acknowledge the work by Ann Toy in 'Politics and Patronage: Sir Henry Parkes's Exhibition legacies'.[3]

The 1879 Sydney International Exhibition gave Parkes the opportunity to indulge his passion as a public and a private collector. It enabled the acquisition of pictures, sculptures and decorative arts intended for the Botanic Gardens, the National Art Gallery and the Colonial Secretary's building.

Parkes regarded art education essential to the creation of a civilised nation. He believed in a child's right to free and high-quality education. He attributed his own intellectual development to his attendance at the Birmingham Mechanics' Institute.

Parkes argued in his newspaper, *The Empire,* for public libraries, working men's institutes, and societies of science and art.

Parkes was not officially on the 1879 Exhibition Committee, but official records reveal the extent to which the Exhibition Commissioners relied on Parkes' advice, influence and intervention. Parkes earmarked future acquisitions and personally negotiated their purchase from the Exhibition. He displayed a preference for Renaissance Revival style furniture rather than a more modern style of decorative art.

The Colonial Secretary's office was fitted out with paintings, engravings and casts which were purchased from the Exhibition, particularly the Italian Court. These were purchased at a discounted price as exhibitors were reluctant to pay excessive shipping costs to send them elsewhere.

An 1879 journal recommended that 'colonial manufacturers might profit from a careful examination of these articles, which are fair specimens of modern Italian industrial art'.

A new museum

The unpublished history of MAAS, 'Palace to Powerhouse' by Jack Willis, attributes Henry Parkes as its founder:

The official establishment of a Technological Museum started in the Australian Museum on 6 August 1878 when the board recommended establishing a Technological and Industrial Museum in Sydney.

[3] In *Colonial city, global city: Sydney's International Exhibition 1879*, Peter Proudfoot, Roslyn Maguire, Robert Freestone editors. Crossing Press, 2000.

The new museum (not quite yet in existence) received a grant of £500 from the Colonial Secretary Henry Parkes. [500 is a good starting figure – I put the first $500 of NSW Government money into both Tropfest and Fashion Week, now cultural fixtures!]

A deputation from the proposed museum met with the Colonial Secretary on 28 December 1879. In addition to locating the Museum in the Garden Palace, the deputation requested Colonial Secretary Parkes to provide £5000 to purchase exhibits from the [upcoming] Melbourne Exhibition and to give consideration to placing the Museum under separate management.

In early 1882, the Technological, Industrial and Sanitary Museum of NSW took possession of part of the Garden Palace with exhibits from the Sydney International Exhibition, Melbourne Exhibition and elsewhere. Approximately nine months later, the Garden Palace and all its contents were burnt to the ground – an inauspicious beginning for what became MAAS, today's Powerhouse.

How thrilled Henry Parkes would be to see the $1.35 billion budget for the Museum for which he found the first £500. But greater still, the expanded role of the Museum in taking STEM subjects to 10,000 Western Sydney School Students each year announced only last Friday with the Lang Walker Family Academy and Western Sydney University.

In September 1880, Parkes journeyed to Melbourne, changing trains – and gauges – at Albury and Wodonga. It was at the Globe Hotel in Albury that Parkes again picked up the federal theme before a captivated audience of 100 or so. He told them he was an Australian first and a NSW man second: "I would never allow…. any attachment to NSW to interfere with the fairest consideration of any great question affecting Australia as a whole." Melbourne publisher George Robinson was so impressed that he produced the speech as a 12-page book.

While in Melbourne, Premier Parkes visited the Melbourne International Exhibition and said that he hoped such exhibitions would advance the cause of Federation. He told the SMH:

> You are aware of course, that I am a most strenuous advocate of the Federation of all Australian Colonies, and I consider the Melbourne Exhibition will indirectly tend to bringing about the movement which I have so thoroughly at heart ….. It will bring thousands from sister colonies to Melbourne. They will say that the Victorians are very much at bottom like themselves, and that they have all in common the Australian Virtues of Hospitality, Warm Heartedness and Enterprise….. If a colony of less than a million inhabitants can start an exhibition….. only second to those held at Philadelphia and Paris, to what might we not hope to aspire if we were united as the 'Australian Dominion' in the same way as the various provinces Canada?

Towards Federalism

From 1880 and for the remainder of his life, Henry Parkes drove the idea of Federalism. However, while he could always rouse a crowd with a personal appearance, the electoral feedback was mixed in his own constituency. His followers fared well, but Henry just scraped back at the end of 1880.

In Melbourne, the premiers of Victoria and South Australia agreed to a Sydney conference in January where they would be joined by Tasmania, Queensland, and Western Australia. At the gathering, Parkes was the elder statesman and the issue of cheap foreign (Chinese) labour divided the colonies, with NSW and Victoria against, and Western and South Australia in favour of cheap imported labour. The resultant Federal Council was mostly noted for its inability to agree on things.

Around this time, Henry began to show that age was catching up with him- as it was even more so for Clarinda, Lady Parkes. The Premier had decided that it was time for his second only international foray- this time to the USA, which had inspired many of his initiatives as well as his native England. Robertson, his old rival, would act as Premier in his absence – the first of a kind for any Australian Premier. He received a much better reception as 'Prime Minister of NSW' than had had previously as a mere Commissioner.

More firsts: first Premier to officially visit Buckingham Palace (to meet with the future King Edward VII); first to dine with a British Prime Minister, William Gladstone; first to meet with a US President, the forgettable Chester A. Arthur; first to address the NY Chamber of Commerce, and so on.

They cheered him on returning home to Sydney in August 1882; and dumped him three months later. On 16 November, his third government fell after four years in office after some of his MPs crossed the floor. Forced to an election, Parkes lost – it was back to struggle street. And the repeat cycle of another failed business dalliance, political obsession; and re-election. Henry Parkes changed seats more often than most MPs changed suits.

He scraped back into Parliament in March 1885 elected narrowly in Goulburn; switched to St Leonards; again became Leader of the Opposition; and romped home as Premier touting free trade and sound financial management in 1887. Another improbable return points to his special place in the collective psychology of NSW, but also speaks volumes about the quality of those opposing him. His personal finances were again in tatters: a £39,000 debt now. Faulconbridge had to go; and in 1888, his exceptional wife Clarinda died after a steady decline. His next resignation followed his loss of the Premiership, but the show – of revolving political doors – went on, with the fifth Parkes Government in March 1889.

But his final years and energy were turned to One People; One Destiny, the coming of nationhood. In this cause, he travelled by steamer to Brisbane, then doubled back to nostalgically and gratefully visit Tenterfield to be with distant constituents who had backed him into Parliament. On this evening 24 October 1889, in the charming and intimate School of Arts where you are now with me, Henry Parkes gave his impassioned and urgent plea for Federation. The *Sydney Morning Herald* was there, so it was carried across all of Australia. It was the trigger, the starters gun in the marathon still ahead to bring this country together, to unite six isolated population centres and the towns and villages in between to a common purpose, and a single flag.

The first Federal Convention was held in Melbourne as a condition of participating, then Sydney where Parkes of course took centre stage among all the Premiers and New Zealand representatives. His toast at the Convention Dinner: ‘One People, One Destiny’. By 1893, when the Federal Convention moved on to Adelaide, Henry was again a backbencher; and by 1896, he was gone.

Henry Parkes died at Annandale aged 80 on 27 April 1896.

That central place in Tom Roberts big picture, ‘The Opening of the Federal Parliament’, was not for Henry Parkes, no matter how much he willed himself to be that man.

He had pursued that vision relentlessly, to the detriment of his own financial survival, to the worry and disruption of his large family (he had married again twice!). He had sat for renowned artists – Streeton and Roberts – almost in anticipation of final victory, but was not to see it. He had worked tirelessly never focussed though on his income, that plagued him repeatedly; and unseated him – and his family- regularly throughout his life.

It was to another artist, Julian Ashton, in a casual moment that he revealed his soul. When sitting for his wonderful intimate portrait, Parkes opened his desk draw to reveal dozens of cheques for sizeable amounts which laid uncashed despite their attached notes about expected results. Parkes upheld the common wealth of Australia, not his own enrichment.

The Federation since Parkes

The Federation has performed remarkably in so many ways that Henry Parkes and other founding Premiers intended. Australia survived two world wars and a Depression in its first half century, and was established as one of the world’s top performing economies by the Centenery of Federation. In that time strategic dependence has switched from Britain to the United States. We have embraced free trade and multiculturalism to build that bigger economic base – although our media continue to report job protection and migration control in implied racist terms. This despite being a true Nation of Immigrants, and the richer for it.

COVID has exposed strengths and weaknesses in our Federation. Going back to Parkes' letter to Florence Nightingale and our first medical school, it is the states which have the only architecture and service delivery structure for health, education, and housing. It was only the states (and territories) that had the existing resources in place to implement a vaccination program. The failure of the Commonwealth to recognise that delayed the COVID vaccination program by six months. This necessitated the states adopting their own versions of protective plans based on Border closures meant to keep COVID out.

We have witnessed border checkpoints not just internationally as anyone would expect, but between the states, and often based on statistically irrelevant case numbers.

Western Australia remains proudly and rather defiantly closed off to the Eastern seaboard. Queensland, having shut down last summer's tourist season is only now looking at opening up for this next summer season, so vital to the entire economy of its south-east corner and main population centre. Their Premiers have been rewarded by this new Health protectionism and see no electoral reason to change tack while the GST agreement means they will be handsomely subsidised by the two big states, NSW and Victoria.

As Alan Kohler put it so well: "Each Premier has been handed the gift of status and power and none will easily give it back; as a result, the balance of power in Australia's federation has changed in ways that will extend well beyond 2021." The Commonwealth may hold some of the purse strings – and aged care is another telling COVID example – but it lacks the structure to deliver the service. It even lacks effective control measures to go with the money it does spend. The slogans around 'We're all in this together' have rung hollow in an Australia where 'on the health advice' state leaders have sealed borders overnight. For the first time since Federation, rather than One People; One Destiny, we have witnessed nine 'jurisdictions' (the new terminology) doing their own thing and being electorally rewarded for doing so.

Simultaneously, in the absence of federal leadership and clear policy direction, we are seeing states beginning to make their own calls on the 'great existential threat' of our era, climate change. In her last week as NSW Premier, Gladys Berejiklian set down a Net Zero carbon timeline that left the Morrison government scrambling. Now the obvious, but politically vexed issue, of nuclear power to achieve carbon zero is on the table, only weeks after the Commonwealth specifically excluded civil nuclear power in its shock nuclear submarine announcement. The states and territories sit on uranium deposits representing a quarter of the world's known deposits and I see this as the next policy battleground in our Federation. The presumption held for the first century of nationhood – that financial control alone would see the Commonwealth prevail – is at risk as never before.

Thank you.