

**My Place for Teachers  
Decade Overview 1900s**

Decade Summary	1908
<p>After the class conflict and economic division of the 1890s, the 1900s saw a genuine desire to ensure that such problems never arose in Australia again. After Federation in 1901, new laws were passed to ensure that disputes between workers and employers were settled fairly at an Arbitration tribunal.</p> <p>Under the Australian Constitution, the Commonwealth Government had the power to make laws for all Australians excluding Indigenous peoples, who were left in the control of the states and were not counted in the Commonwealth census.</p> <p>Simultaneously, a series of other progressive initiatives were achieved: women gained the right to vote and stand for parliament; pensions for the elderly and invalids were instituted.</p> <p>In 1906, the 'New Protection' legislative law was passed. New Protection dominated the work of the newly formed Commonwealth Parliament. The law was a major policy direction of that Parliament's social engineering. In common with other newly created countries, the Commonwealth of Australia sought to determine the type of society it wished to be and to implement policies towards that end, such as the so-called White Australia Policy. The society envisioned was that of an affluent white society. This policy had serious consequences for existing Indigenous and ethnic groups in the country or wanting to immigrate.</p> <p>In December 1902, Brisbane was accorded city status.</p> <p>Although now 'Australian' by geography, many people still thought of themselves as British. This was exemplified by popular children's books such as <i>Deeds that Won the Empire</i> by WH Fitchett.</p>	<p><b>March</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mawson and David scale Mount Erebus in Antarctica.</li> </ul> <p><b>May</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The first official Australian Coat of Arms is granted.</li> <li>• Alfred Deakin's government is defeated and Andrew Fisher becomes prime minister.</li> </ul> <p><b>July</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The <i>Invalid and Old Age Pensions Act 1908</i> (Cth) is passed.</li> </ul> <p><b>August</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Great White Fleet sent by President Roosevelt arrives in Australia at Alfred Deakin's request.</li> </ul> <p><b>September</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'My Country', Dorothy Mackellar's poem, is published in London's <i>Spectator</i>.</li> </ul> <p><b>October</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Canberra is selected for the site of a national capital city.</li> </ul>

## History and Politics

### Nationhood

The Commonwealth of Australia came into existence on 1 January 1901. The first prime minister Edmund Barton was sworn into office by the first governor-general, the Earl of Hopetoun.

In March 1901, the first federal elections were held. In May the first Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia was opened by the Duke of Cornwall and York (the future King George V).

In April 1901, the first Australian Labor Party caucus was convened.

The design for the Australian flag was chosen in September 1901.

The *Commonwealth Franchise Act 1902* (Cth) gave women the right to vote in federal elections. The Constitution said that Aboriginal people were not to be counted in the census, which was to be used as a basis for determining electorates. As a result, they were denied the right to vote.

At this time in the Boer War campaign, the British executed the Australian soldier (enlisted in the British army) Henry Harbord (Harry) 'The Breaker' Morant for having shot enemy soldiers who surrendered.

In September of 1903, Alfred Deakin became prime minister. In December women voted for the first time and four women stood for the Senate.

In 1909, compulsory military training was enacted.

In 1910 Australian Commonwealth silver coins were introduced. In 1911, bronze pennies and halfpennies were introduced.

The first Australian bank notes based on the British system of 12 pence to a shilling and 20 shillings to a pound were introduced in 1913.

### The White Australia Policy

The new Federal government passed immigration laws. The *Immigration Restriction Act 1901* (Cth) was passed, allowing the government to keep out unwanted immigrants by applying a dictation test in any European language of the government's choosing. The act was written with the intention of keeping out non-Europeans and was known as the White Australia Policy.

In addition, the *Pacific Island Labourers Act 1901* (Cth) stated that any Pacific Islanders still living in Australia in five years' time would be deported. This law was passed to expel the 'kanaka' labourers who were working in the emerging Australian sugar industry.

### Economic growth

In 1905, a renewed period of economic growth began and was sustained until 1914. Prices for Australian exports began to recover from the 1890s slump and overseas investors recognised Australia as a viable market for growth. Australia's primary and mainly agricultural industries flourished. For example, butter exports in 1891 were 1.8 million kilograms, and by 1911 were 46.2 million kilograms. Trade within Australia showed the benefits of Federation and was typified by interstate tariffs being removed. The economic life of Australia in many ways continued as if the states and territories were still colonies. In 1906, a Royal Commission into shipping found it was more expensive to ship goods between Adelaide and Melbourne than it was between Melbourne and London.

**The basic wage**

In November 1907, Justice Higgins, President of the Commonwealth Court of Conciliation and Arbitration, delivered his 'Harvester' judgement. An employer, HV McKay, was applying for exemption from the 'New Protection' excise taxes because the wages he paid were 'fair and reasonable'. Higgins inquired into exactly what was required to pay for and support a family of the era. He found against McKay, and laid down for the first time the principle of the basic wage as every worker's right.

## Society and Culture

<b>Education</b>	<p>In 1901, a Royal Commission on Technical Education (the 'Fink Report') in Victoria recommended a new type of secondary technical school. A new syllabus (curriculum) was introduced in 1902, with greater emphasis on science, 'aesthetics and social living'.</p> <p>In 1905, Victoria's first public secondary school, the 'Continuation School', was established in Melbourne. However, it was not until 1918 that the state secondary school system was fully established for all students.</p>
<b>Surfing</b>	<p>In February 1907, a group of surfers formed the Bondi Surf Bathers' Lifesaving Club, making it the first lifesaving club in the world. One of the first people rescued was the future famous pilot and aviator, Charles Kingsford Smith.</p> <p>In March 1907, the surf-lifesaving reel was devised and first used. Soon after the lifesavers' club was founded, the law was changed so surf bathing in the daytime was allowed in Sydney. Until this time it was illegal to surf between 6 am and 8 pm.</p>
<b>Defending Australia</b>	<p>In August 1908, the United States navy arrived in Sydney to begin a month's visit on invitation from the prime minister, Alfred Deakin. Its purpose was a worldwide training exercise and to display a naval presence in the Pacific region.</p> <p>In 1909, the <i>Defence Act Amendment Act 1909</i> introduced compulsory service for the defence of Australia only. Two years later, the first compulsory military training program for boys was established.</p>
<b>Arts</b>	<p>In 1901, <i>My Brilliant Career</i> by Miles Franklin was published.</p> <p>In 1902, after years spent singing in the great Opera Houses of Europe and acclaimed by both press and the public Dame Nellie Melba made a triumphant homecoming tour, with concerts throughout the country. Everywhere she went, Melba was greeted enthusiastically by crowds of people</p> <p>In 1903, <i>Such is Life: Being extracts from the Diary of Tom Collins</i> by Joseph Furphy was published.</p> <p>In 1906, AB Paterson wrote and published his novel, <i>An Outback Marriage</i>.</p> <p>In 1908, Henry Handel Richardson's first novel <i>Maurice Guest</i> was published. The children's book <i>We of the Never Never</i> by Mrs Aeneas Gunn was published the same year. <i>We of the Never Never</i> is a personal account of life on a cattle station in a remote part of Northern Territory between 1902 and 1904.</p> <p>In 1908, Dorothea Mackellar's poem 'My Country' was published in London. The poem was written on a NSW property just as a severe drought was breaking. The poem represents a growing national pride for native-born Australians.</p>

## Science and Technology

### Innovations and discoveries

In 1900, more than 103 people died from the bubonic plague in Sydney. Between 1900 and 1909, 219 people died from bubonic plague in Brisbane. In 1905, dengue fever broke out in Queensland and northern New South Wales, resulting in thousands being infected and the loss of many lives.

In 1900, an artesian bore in Roma, Queensland, yielded Australia's first natural gas.

In 1900, Adelaide introduced electric street lighting, though Tamworth in regional NSW was the first town to introduce it in 1888. In 1904, Sydney streets were lit for the first time by electric lights, ten years after Melbourne, whose city streets were illuminated by electricity in 1894.

In 1901, Tarrant Motor and Engineering Company of Melbourne manufactured the first successful Australian petrol-driven car. In 1905 Frank Bottril patented his 'pedorail', a caterpillar-style road wheel that would subsequently be used on many tractors throughout Australia.

In 1905, the first purpose built cinema opened in Sydney.

In 1907, a telephone trunk line opened between Sydney and Melbourne.

In 1908, the Commonwealth Bureau of Meteorology opened in Melbourne. In the following year, Observatories traced Halley's comet return for the first time since 1844.

In 1909, Edgeworth David, Douglas Mawson and Alistair McKay reached the south magnetic pole.

In 1909, the Aerial League of Australia was formed with members including George Taylor, Lawrence Hargrave and Major Charles Rosenthal. At Narrabeen, NSW, he designed and built a glider (a full-size biplane fitted with a double box kite), which was the first unpowered flight in Australia.