

# Tenterfield Oration

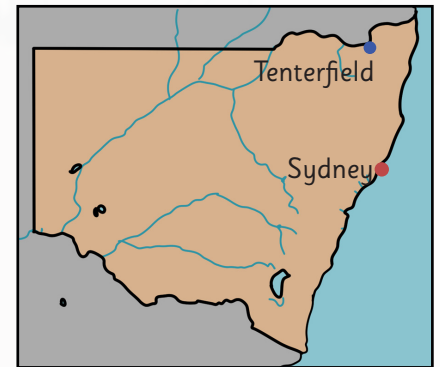
Historical recount



On 24<sup>th</sup> October 1889, Sir Henry Parkes, the Premier of New South Wales, delivered a speech at the Tenterfield School of Arts. This speech became known as the Tenterfield Oration. The oration was the first public appeal for the six colonies of Australia to federate.

For the first one hundred years, the colonies of Australia had developed separately. They were self-governing and under the distant authority of Britain. However, by the 1880s, there was a move towards economic and social integration. Politicians were starting to discuss how the colonies may come together to form one united nation.

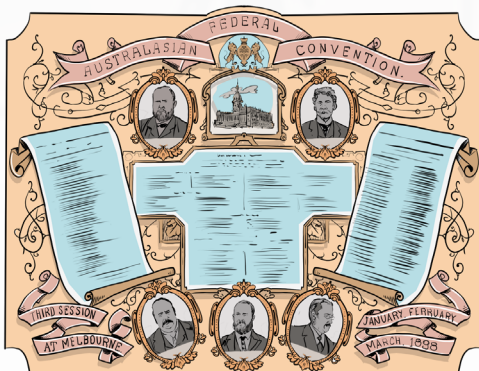
Prior to the Tenterfield Oration, Parkes had visited Brisbane to discuss federation. On his return to Sydney, he stopped in Tenterfield. Tenterfield was a special place for Parkes. After he lost his seat of East Sydney in the 1882 election, he travelled to Tenterfield where the locals re-elected him to parliament. Tenterfield is located in rural New South Wales, near the Queensland border. It is closer to the commercial areas of Queensland than Sydney. The town was struggling with tariffs they had to pay to take goods into Queensland and people in the area were very keen to see the introduction of free trade between the colonies.



A map showing the location of Tenterfield

At the time when Parkes was visiting Tenterfield, there was a growing sense of Australian nationalism, as the population was now predominantly Australian born. Parkes used this to his advantage and addressed the public, arguing that federation would allow the military of each colony to unite as one army and railway gauges could be made uniform, allowing an ease of trade around the country. He appealed to the public stating:

**'The great question which we have to consider is, whether the time has not now arisen for the creation on this Australian continent of an Australian government and an Australian parliament ... Surely what the Americans have done by war, Australians can bring about in peace.'**



The following day, the Tenterfield Oration was reported in Sydney newspapers and Parkes was asked to return to Sydney and repeat the speech. It was then repeated 15 times in nine months around the six colonies. As a result of the speech, the colonies agreed to send delegates to Melbourne in 1890 for the constitutional conference.

Parkes continued to put all his efforts into federation and helped the governments of the colonies negotiate towards this unity. 12 years after the Tenterfield Oration was first delivered, Australia was federated and became known as The Commonwealth of Australia.