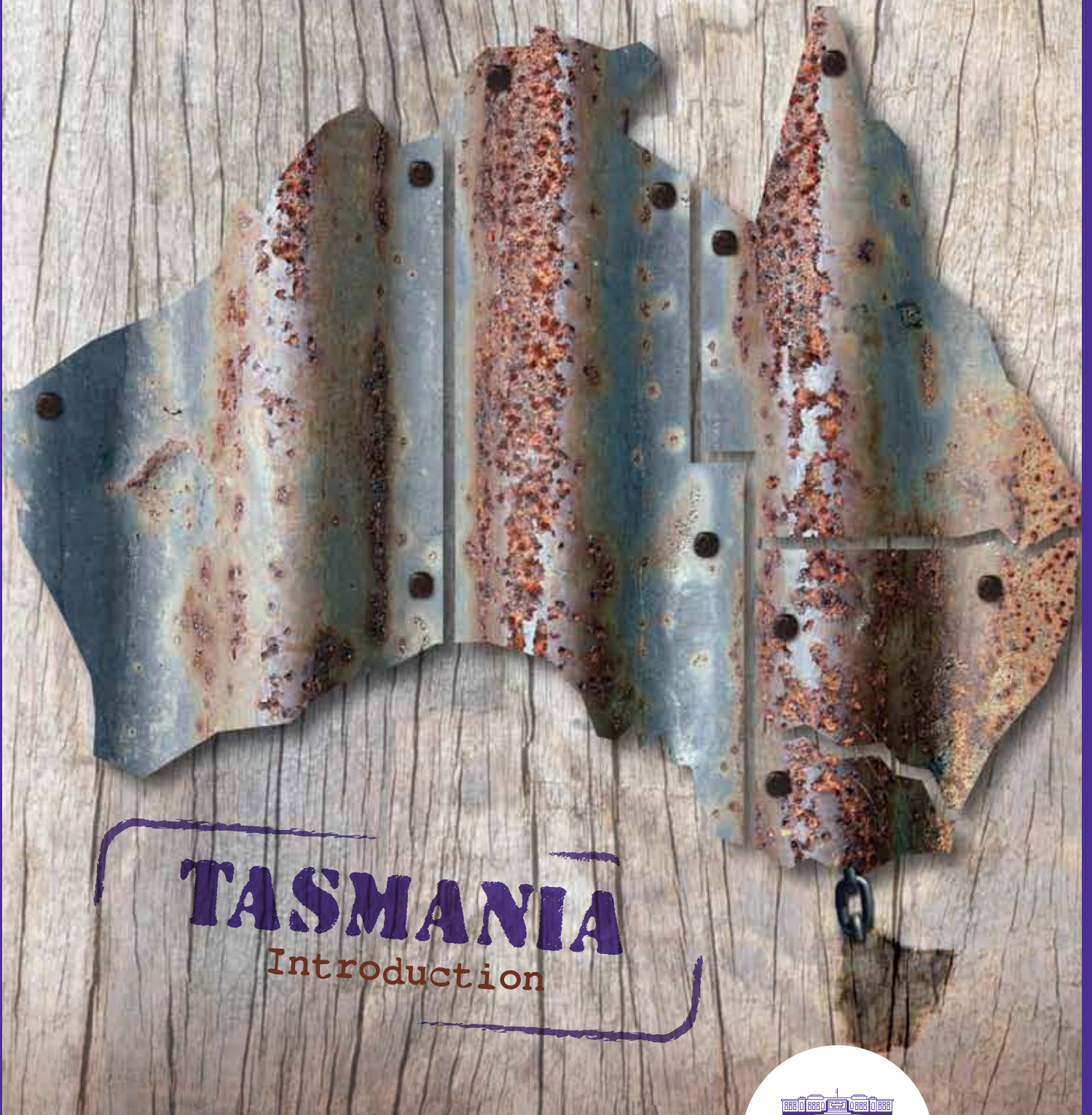


GETTING IT TOGETHER

From Colonies to Federation



TASMANIA

Introduction



MUSEUM
OF AUSTRALIAN
DEMOCRACY

OLD PARLIAMENT HOUSE

INVESTIGATIONS OF
AUSTRALIA'S JOURNEY
TO NATIONHOOD
FOR THE MIDDLE
YEARS CLASSROOM

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From Colonies to Federation

TASMANIA

The first European name for Tasmania was Van Diemen's Land. It was given to the island by the Dutch explorer Abel Tasman in the 1640s. When Britain began settlement of eastern Australia in 1788, its claim extended to Van Diemen's Land, which became part of the colony of New South Wales. The British established a penal settlement there in 1803, founding Hobart in the following year. More than 70,000 convicts were sent there between 1803 and 1853. In 1825, Van Diemen's Land became a colony in its own right – the second of the Australian colonies.

From the establishment of the penal settlement, there was an uneasy coexistence between the Indigenous people and the British settlers. Indigenous people increasingly found themselves losing their country and hunting grounds. A series of coordinated, violent confrontations with the settlers began in the 1820s; a period which came to be known as the 'Black Wars'. At the height of the conflict, the colonist George Robertson led the Friendly Mission in which he convinced the elders of the Indigenous groups to agree to peace. In exchange, they would be allowed to settle on the islands of Bass Strait, in particular Flinders Island. The Indigenous elders agreed to the plan, as long as they could maintain contact with their traditional lands. This part of the bargain was never honoured. Due to the ravages of disease and inadequate living conditions on the islands many Indigenous people died.

In 1856, the name 'Tasmania' became official and Tasmania was granted self-government – the right to have an elected parliament instead of being ruled by a British governor. Four other Australian colonies – Victoria, South Australia, Western Australia and Queensland – were established and granted self-government in the 1800s.

Tasmania was the smallest of all the colonies, but it had strong farming, whaling and mining industries. Trade was important to the small island's economy, which exported most of its products to the other colonies. The Tasmanian Government also relied on income from intercolonial tariffs, or taxes charged on goods arriving from the other colonies. These tariffs paid for public services such as schools and transport. Some of the other colonies had similar tariffs, except New South Wales, the largest and wealthiest colony. It was against intercolonial tariffs because it made trade harder and more expensive.

In the early 1890s, Tasmania experienced an economic depression. Businesses struggled and politicians were more concerned than ever about protecting the colony's industries through tariffs. At the same time, the notion of Federation became a topic of public debate. The idea behind Federation was that nationhood would make the whole country stronger; the colonies would all be subject to the same federal laws and they would all be represented in a federal parliament.

What possible benefits or disadvantages might there be for Tasmania if it united with the other colonies? Federation could help ensure that the colonies continued to buy Tasmanian products because no international tariffs or customs duties could be levied against them by the States. However, Tasmania would lose the income it collected from tariffs on imports from the mainland and without these, products from the other colonies could better compete against Tasmanian ones. At the Australasian Federal Conventions held in the 1890s, representatives from the colonies debated this issue. They drafted an Australian Constitution, which planned how a federal parliament would work. Tasmania and New South Wales disagreed about the proposed structure of a federal parliament and what each colony's voting power would be.

In 1898, people from four of the colonies voted in a referendum on the draft Constitution. A majority of voters in Tasmania said 'yes' to Federation. So did those in Victoria and South Australia. But, there were not enough 'yes' votes in New South Wales, so Federation could not go ahead.

In 1899, after changes to the Constitution were negotiated, there was another referendum. Tasmania, New South Wales, South Australia, Victoria and Queensland took part and all voted 'yes' to Federation. A successful referendum in Western Australia followed in 1900, confirming that all six colonies would unite. The official inauguration of the Commonwealth of Australia was on 1 January 1901. The peaceful transition from separate colonies to a nation sharing common laws and goals was a milestone for Australia's democracy. On the long-awaited 'Commonwealth Day', Tasmanians, along with other Australians, celebrated the fact that they were all part of a larger national life.



Your tasks

For you to investigate

There are three themes for you to investigate. Each has information and activities to help you dig deeper into the story of Tasmania's journey from colony to Federation.

People and Places

Investigate aspects of life in Tasmania in the years before Federation, especially the 1890s when there were many changes taking place in the colony.

Road to Federation

Investigate issues influencing Tasmanians' opinions on Federation, why there were different points of view, and the colony's final vote.

Celebrations and Futures

Investigate how Tasmania celebrated Federation when it began, and how being part of the Australian Commonwealth continues to be celebrated today.