

'A Few of My Favourite Things', Number Six: A Card for Our Times

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We often hear that a storm, or a hot day, or a bushfire is “a once in a century event”. Usually, it is just hyperbole, the catastrophising language of an unimaginative news reporter. However, we all think of COVID-19, or novel coronavirus, as truly a once in a century disaster. We, the Baby Boomers, might have had knowledge of the Spanish Flu that decimated populations around the globe in 1919. Our children did not. But now, they all know that, almost exactly 100 years ago, the world was in the grip of another pandemic that took the lives of millions, including in Australia.

Go back a little further and we come to the 1890s, when the demand for a national identity, and a break with the conventions, restrictions and control of the ‘Mother Country’, spurred the cry for the six Australian Colonies (and, until the eleventh hour, New Zealand) to unite together under one flag as the Federation of the Commonwealth of Australia.

Despite the almost universal appeal of coming together as one country, States’ Rights was almost as big an issue. Allow me to quote a truly odious jingle: “We’re all in this together”, but some more than others. This was essentially the attitude of those in all six Colonies who were determined to make sure that their bailiwicks were not disadvantaged in any way. Federation was a fine notion but it was vital that each protected their own rights as the soon-to-be States of that federation.

In fact, Federation was for years on a very rocky track, often threatened with derailment by the competing interests of, on the one hand, Sydney and Melbourne as the senior capitals, and on the other of the minions in the less populous and less pretentious Perth, Adelaide and Brisbane. And...Hobart.

Henry Parkes may have fired-up the crowd in Tenterfield with his call for free trade between the colonies, a uniform gauge for railway lines and a united policy on defence, but he was stepping on the toes of those who insisted on the rights of their colonies to impose and collect tariffs and customs duties. This was a matter of money as much as national pride.

The borders between the six colonies had been established

during the era of exploration and White settlement and had been little changed since. The borders provided both comfort and isolation. A federal structure promised to remove both. And, that was a key concern for the States’ Rights brigade.

In the end, after much beating of breasts, gnashing of teeth, and tearing-out of beards, the naysayers were mollified or defeated, and the Commonwealth of Australia was proclaimed on 1 January 1901.

The postcard featured here trumpeted the success of the federal



Figure 1

movement. Down came the physical barriers between the new States, and up went the standard of the new united Federation.

If only it had been so simple. Western Australia has often grumbled about secession and even caused a referendum on the subject in 1933. Even Victoria has postured about going it alone. 120 years on from Federation Day and we are seeing strong evidence that the States want to revert to the old ways of ‘protecting’ themselves and their constituents, while ostracising and banishing their ‘fellow Australians’ behind new physical barriers and the spectre of ‘border forces’.

This is not what our Fathers of Federation expected and not what Lord Hopetoun signed up for when, after having served as Governor of the Colony of Victoria during the 1890s, was asked to return Down Under as Governor-General of the entire country. Hopetoun was a staunch ally of the federal movement and a popular choice as the first viceroy of the newly-birthing nation.



Figure 2

A portrait of the Earl of Hopetoun, ‘Johnny Hope’ to his friends, features on the address side of the card, surmounted by two rather unfamiliar banners. The first appears to be an amalgam of the Union Jack, the Stars and Stripes, and the Eureka Flag of the dissident gold miners from the 1850s! This camel of a design was the winning entry in the Federal Flag Design Competition conducted in 1900 by the *Melbourne Herald* newspaper and, fortunately, had no official standing.

The other, that uncannily resembles the pizza staple ‘quattro stagioni’, is Queen Victoria’s Royal Ensign, a strange choice given that Her Majesty was only weeks away from death and definitely not visiting Australia at the time.

Note: ¹ A dish of warmed-up food left over from a previous meal

The flag eventually chosen by Edmund Barton’s government was very close to the design we have all known during our lifetimes. However, it certainly was not everyone’s cup of tea. The republican satirical magazine *The Bulletin* offered these condemnatory lines: “It is a staled *réchauffé*¹ of the British flag, with no artistic value, no national significance...Minds move slowly and Australia is still Britain’s little boy. What more natural than that he should accept his father’s cut-down garments...This bastard flag is a true symbol of the bastard state of Australian opinion...”

Whatever, I really appreciate and enjoy this card. Not only is it colourful, a feature enhanced by the scarce usage of the Victoria 1½d apple-green adhesive, but it is dated JA 1/01, the date of the inauguration of the Commonwealth and, not unimportantly, the starting date for my collection of overseas destination mail.

Add to that, the evocative illustration of an emancipation of borders that seems so topical for being at risk today, and you will understand why this little gem is one of My Favourite Things.

More Pre-decimal QEII Uncatalogued Stamp Varieties

Ted Gallagher FRPSV

Further to my article in the December 2020 issue of *Philately from Australia*, below are some more constant varieties which are not listed in *The Australian Commonwealth Specialists’ Catalogue (ACSC)*.

1960 CENTENARY OF NORTHERN TERRITORY EXPLORATION

Retouch to top left corner, sheet A, 2/7. This is not recorded in any journals. However, I have multiple copies.



Retouch



Normal