The first parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia opened in Melbourne on 9 May 1901. The foundation parliamentarians, consisting of 36 senators and 75 members of the House of Representatives, sat in an inaugural session which ran until 10 October 1902, and a second session between 26 May and 22 October 1903.

This survey examines sources that deal with the formation and working of the first parliament, without venturing into the broad area of the long-term results of legislative and political issues which it addressed.

Bibliographies

The history of the federation movement in the second half of the nineteenth century has been a focus of research and has received detailed attention from bibliographers. The bibliography by L.F. Crisp in *The Later Australian Federation Movement, 1883-1901: Outline and Bibliography* (1979) remains an admirable summary of federation literature to the time of its publication. This work is now complemented by *Federation: the Guide to Records* (1998), a landmark work published by Australian Archives, which gathers details of archives and manuscripts in Australian repositories relating to federation and its aftermath. J.D. Holmes’ typescript ‘Bibliography of federation’ in the National Library (ms 304), remains a valuable and under-used resource.

Historians, political scientists and biographers have generally examined the first parliament in the context of a broader study, and this is reflected in its bibliographic treatment. No bibliography has focused exclusively on the early parliament, although a number have included relevant material. These included J.J. Pettifer’s ‘Bibliography’ in his 1981 edition of *House of Representatives Practice*, R.L. Cope’s

**Parliamentary, political and legal histories**


Some works by contemporary writers throw light on the work of the first parliament. Foremost among these is *Federated Australia* (1968), selections from Alfred Deakin’s anonymous column in the *Morning Post* during the early years of federation. Henry Gyles Turner wrote *The First Decade of the Australian Commonwealth: a Chronicle of Contemporary Politics 1900-1910* (1911) and B.R. Wise *The Commonwealth of Australia* (1909). George Cockerill, an *Age* journalist, wrote anecdotes of early parliamentarians in *Scribblers and Statesmen* (1948). Some autobiographies of early federal parliamentarians are mentioned below.


General histories of Australia deal with varying detail with the first years of the Commonwealth Parliament. Of these, W.K. Hancock’s essay ‘The Commonwealth 1900-1914’ in the volume ‘Australia’ of the *Cambridge History of the British Empire* (vol. VII, Part 1, 1933) is a very lucid examination of the issues facing the first parliament. In the same volume, essays by W. Harrison Moore ‘The constitution and its working’ and F.W. Eggleston ‘Australia and the Empire 1855-1921’ are also


**Parliamentary and other official publications**

A range of parliamentary publications date back to federation and comprise a primary source for research. The *Australian Parliamentary Papers* series, documenting much work of the chambers and parliamentary committees, commenced in 1901. The *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates* provide a transcript of debate in both houses.
from the first day of sitting. Copies of bills and acts were published as they were considered and passed; the multi-volume work *Acts of the Australian Parliament 1901-1973* appeared in 1972-77, and in 1914, a 3-volume *Statutory Rules from 1901 to 1914 made under Commonwealth Acts*. Each of the houses of parliament published an official record of its proceedings daily; *Journals* in the case of the Senate and *Votes and Proceedings* in the case of the House of Representatives, and each house from commencement published a *Notice Paper*. In 1903 the Senate published *Standing Orders Adopted by the Senate 19 August 1903*, and the House of Representatives published, in its parliamentary papers, *Temporary Standing Orders*, in 1901.

Other official publications of relevance as primary sources include the *Commonwealth Law Reports* from 1903; the *Australian Argus Law Reports*, which included High Court decisions after 1903, and became the *Australian Law Report* in 1973; *Commonwealth Arbitration Reports* from 1905; the *Classified Election Returns* issued by the Commonwealth Electoral Office from 1901; the *Commonwealth of Australia Gazette* from 1901; the *Official Yearbook of the Commonwealth of Australia* (No. 1, 1901-7, issued in 1908); and *Reports* of the Conferences of Secretaries of State and Prime Ministers of Self-Governing Colonies (in *Parliamentary Papers* 1902 and 1907/8) and State Premiers’ conferences (Conference of Commonwealth and States), also in *Parliamentary Papers*.

**Unpublished sources**

Collections of papers relating to members or associates of the first parliament are held in public repositories in Australia. *Parliamentary Voices in History* (1991), compiled by Carmel McInerny, is a guide to the location of the personal papers of federal parliamentarians, including a number of members of the first parliament. The National Library of Australia holds major collections of papers of Edmund Barton (ms 51), Alfred Deakin (ms 1540), William Morris Hughes (ms 1538), Hugh Mahon (ms 93), Patrick McMahon Glynn (ms 553, 1196, 1084), King O’Malley (ms 460) Littleton Groom (ms 236) and Josiah Symon (ms 1736). Lesser collections relate to Andrew Fisher (ms 2919), James Fowler (ms 2280), Robert Garran (ms 2001), Henry Bournes Higgins (ms 1057), Frederick Holder (ms 2268) J.M.H. Cook (ms 601), John Kirwan (ms 277), William Lyne (ms 129), Lord Tennyson (ms 1963), John Christian Watson (ms 451), Isaac Isaacs (ms 2755), George Foster Pearce (ms 213, 192), and Samuel Mauger (ms 1895). The Mitchell Library, Sydney, holds papers of Samuel Walker Griffith (ms Q181-199), Richard O’Connor (ms F4) and on microfilm, the Earl of Hopetoun (mfm 936-937). The papers of James George Drake are held in the Oxley Library, Brisbane (OM 66-4), and papers relating to John Forrest are in the Battye Library (WA). A typescript by an *Argus* reporter, Herbert Campbell-Jones, ‘A cabinet of captains: the romance of Australia’s first federal parliament’ [1935] (in the National Library at ms 8905) is also of interest.

**Biographies**

There are a number of scholarly biographies of early parliamentarians. Foremost among these are J.A. La Nauze’s *Alfred Deakin* (2 vols, 1965), L.F. Fitzhardinge’s *William Morris Hughes* (1964), F.K. Crowley’s biography of John Forrest (1971 and 2000) and *Charles Cameron Kingston* by Margaret Glass (1997). Others include *Pit Boy to Prime Minister: the story of the Rt Hon Sir Joseph Cook* by G. Bebbington (1988) and *Sir Joe: a Political Biography of Sir Joseph Cook* by J. Murdoch (1996);
King O’Malley by Dorothy Catts (1957), King O’Malley by Arthur Hoyle (1981) and O’Malley, MHR by Larry Noye (1985); James Howard Catts MHR by Dorothy Catts (1953); Isaac Isaacs by Zelman Cowen (1967), and Sir Isaac Isaacs by M. Gordon (1963); Alfred Deakin by Walter Deakin (1941); Nation Building in Australia: the Life and Work of Sir Littleton Groom by Littleton Groom (1941); Quiet Decision: a Study of George Foster Pearce by Peter Heydon (1965); George Reid by W.G. McMinn (1989); Patrick McMahon Glynn by G. O’Collins (1965); Henry Bournes Higgins by Nettie Palmer (1931) and H.B. Higgins by John Rickard (1984); and Edmund Barton by J. Reynolds (1948). A major biography of Edmund Barton, by Geoffrey Bolton, is in publication.

Collective biographies which include early parliamentarians include Joan Rydon’s Biographical Register of the Australian Parliament, 1901-1972 (1975) and The Australian Dictionary of Biography (1966- ). The first volume of a Biographical Dictionary of the Australian Senate is in press, and The Parliamentary Handbook has been mentioned above. There are also summaries of the lives and political careers of a high proportion of the first parliamentarians in the various biographical registers of the Australian colonial parliaments.

Autobiographies
Alfred Deakin’s The Federal Story (first published 1944) does not extend to an account of Deakin’s experiences in the first parliament, but it does provide pen portraits of a number of men who were later federal parliamentarians. Prosper the Commonwealth by Robert Garran is a first-hand account of the early years of the commonwealth by the first secretary of the Attorney-General’s department, and provides insights into the early legislative program, and drafting. Patrick McMahon Glynn: Letters to his Family 1874-1927, published in 1974, includes letters about the opening of parliament and the first years of sitting by a member of the first parliament. Billy Hughes wrote two volumes of autobiography, one of which, Policies and Potentates (1950) is relevant to this period, as is My Life’s Adventures by John Kirwan (1936), Carpenter to Cabinet by George Foster Pearce (1951); My Reminiscences by George Reid (1917) and, very slightly, Australia’s Awakening by William Guthrie Spence (1909).