

# The 'Grand **Old Man**' of Australian politics still **serv**ing Australian library **patrons**

Henry Parkes was born in Warwickshire in the same year Napoleon was defeated at Waterloo – 1815. After losing two infant children and a failed business venture in Birmingham, Parkes and his first wife Clarinda emigrated as assisted migrants to the colony of NSW.

Penniless and uneducated, Parkes was however well read including both politics and poetry, and after working initially as a farm labourer in NSW, he moved to work at the Customs Department in Sydney before going into business with varied success. With his outstanding speaking and writing skills, Parkes played a major part in the growth of democracy in the NSW, spending 50 years as a Parliamentarian in NSW and five terms as Premier. He is credited with a major role in the cessation of convict transportation, of founding the public education system in NSW, of ensuring the use of trained nurses in hospitals, of supporting self government, universal suffrage, free trade and immigration and with passionate support for Federation. His leadership skills and his integrity commanded respect on all sides and lead to other descriptions as the 'Father of Federation' or the 'Grand Old Man' of Australian politics.

Members of Parliament were not paid a salary though in the 19th century, and Parkes experienced considerable financial difficulties at different times in his life. His first wife was often short of money and pestered by creditors, while caring for their six children and Parkes finally died in poverty in 1896.

Now, 192 years since his birth, the Henry Parkes Foundation, the non-partisan, non-profit, charitable trust set up to honour him, has made an additional donation of \$10 000 to the State Library of NSW to complete the microfilming and digitisation of the Henry Parkes Papers. Alan Ventress, the Chair of the Henry Parkes Foundation and a former Mitchell Librarian, organised the initial donation of \$10 000 from the Foundation in 2003 for the microfilming and digitisation project, and this second donation will allow that work to be completed. The Henry Parkes family papers date from 1803 until Henry Parkes' death in 1896.

NSW Governor Marie Bashir, Patron of the Henry Parkes Foundation, presented the \$10 000 cheque to Regina Sutton, State Librarian and Chief Executive at a function at the State Library of NSW on 12 February 2007.

Elizabeth Swan



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