

Sydney's Paddy's Markets helps celebrate Australia Day 2006

Whilst Australia Day is now celebrated on the actual day, January 26th, for many years the public holiday was held on the closest Monday to provide a long weekend.

In 2006, Australia Day will again be held on the actual day and is marked by celebrations and ceremonies across the country including Order of Australia and Australian of the Year awards as well as citizenship ceremonies.

History of Australia Day

On January 26, 1788 Captain Arthur Phillip took formal possession of the colony of New South Wales and became its first Governor.

The fledging colony soon began to celebrate the anniversary of this date. Manning Clarke notes that in 1808 the "anniversary of the foundation of the colony" was observed in the traditional manner with "drinking and merriment".

The first official celebrations were held in 1818 to mark the 30th anniversary of white settlement. Governor Macquarie officiated at a thirty-gun salute during the day and a dinner ball at Government House that evening.

Foundation Day

During the early nineteenth century the anniversary was called 'Foundation Day' and was usually marked by sporting events. Horseracing was popular in the 1820s, whilst regattas became popular in the 1830s.

One of these, the Anniversary Regatta which was first held in 1836, is still held on Sydney Harbour on January 26 each year. Now called the Australia Day Regatta it is the oldest continuous regatta in the world.

A growing sense of patriotism was also being expressed in other ways. In 1824 Charles Tompson, reputed to be our first Australia-born poet, composed Wild Notes from the Lyre of a Native Minstrel.

Fifty years after Phillip landed Australia's first public

holiday was announced to celebrate Foundation Day 1838. The inaugural holiday became an annual event and has continued to be held on or around January 26.

United festivities

Unlike previous years, when the celebrations were mainly private, the 1838 celebrations were a 'day for everyone' with the harbour foreshores crowded and a cracker display for the people.

By 1888, gold had been found and Australia's population had grown to nearly three million. All the colonial capitals, except Adelaide, proclaimed 'Anniversary Day' a public holiday and celebrations took place throughout the individual colonies.

The centenary was marked by ceremonies, parades, exhibitions, fireworks, banquets, church services and regattas. An estimated 50,000 people watched the Governor, Lord Carrington, unveil a statue in honour of Queen Victoria. Although the talk was of federation there was no question of the Australian people's loyalty to the mother country.

The 150th anniversary of white settlement in 1938 were marked with official ceremonies around the nation celebrating the arrival of Captain Phillip.

The show piece of the NSW celebrations was a re-enactment of Phillip's landing, complete with the deposition of a party of Aborigines. The latter group had been brought to Sydney when their city counterparts refused to participate in what they called a 'grossly theatrical re-enactment'.

Several hours before the re-enactment Aboriginal activists convened a 'Day of Mourning' conference aimed at securing citizenship and equal status for Aborigines.

Interestingly, the celebrations omitted any mention of Australia's convict roots.

Australia Day

Finally, in 1946, the Commonwealth Government, States and Territories agreed to observe one national day 'Australia Day' under one banner and on the same day.

During this period the celebrations continued to have a

largely imperial feel consisting mainly of formal re-enactments of the First Fleet's landing.

The National Australia Day Council was formed in 1979, with state and territory councils and committees soon after. From their inception they have encouraged more 'grass roots' celebrations, working with local government authorities to promote the wider celebration of Australia Day.

However, the Australia Day public holiday was still held on the Monday closest to January 26 and to the broader community it was just another holiday.

In our bi-centenary year, 1988, the Australia Day public holiday was held around the nation on January 26. The highlight of the many celebrations was a re-enactment of the First Fleet's trip which departed from Portsmouth on May 13, 1987 and arrived in Australia in early January. Britain then presented the tall ship, Young Endeavour, to Australia as its bi-centennial present.

Alongside the celebrations 1988 was named a Year of Mourning for Australia's Aboriginal people, who also regarded the year as a celebration of survival. It was the most vocal indigenous presence ever felt on 26 January.

In addition to the celebrations the bi-centennial left a legacy of tangible projects. Often funded by the Federal, State and Territory Governments these diverse and useful projects are lasting monuments to the celebrations.

Since the bi-centenary Australia Day celebrations have continued to grow in number and stature with the celebrations continuing to involve a larger and broader audience.

It was not until 1994 however, that all the states and territories endorsed the celebration of Australia Day on the actual day instead of the closest Monday. United Australia Day celebrations have been held on 26 January ever since.

2006 Celebrations

Australia will be celebrating in true "Aussie" tradition with barbecues being the order of the day. Sydney will

enjoy fireworks displays over the harbour as well as several music festivals including The Big Day Out. Sydney's Paddy's Markets Haymarket will be open 9am to 5pm and is ideal for picking up those last minute festivity goodies including Australian flags, hats, caps and party decorations. If you are planning a BBQ, remember Paddy's is home to Sydney's freshest seafood and fruit and vegetables.

For event details call the infoline or visit www.paddysmarkets.com.au.

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