While the Australian Delegation was in London negotiating the final issues of the Constitution Bill with the Colonial Secretary, Joseph Chamberlain, the Colonial Premiers were reviewing organisational changes that heralded the dawn of the new Commonwealth on 1st January 1901. The States had succeeded in preserving a position for themselves as ‘sovereign within their sphere’ (Twomey 19) and a prime consideration was to establish the status of the Governor in this new era. In New South Wales, Lord Beauchamp was the last Colonial Governor and during 1900 he was destined to endure the political manoeuvres of the Premier, Sir William Lyne, who sought a leading role for the State in the celebration of Federation and recognition of its influence in federal matters thereafter.

When Lord Beauchamp’s predecessor, Lord Hampden, suddenly resigned the governorship early in 1899, Joseph Chamberlain had to take prompt action. It was essential to appoint another Governor who would maintain the British connection while the Colony engaged in the processes leading up to Federation. Lord Beauchamp was surprised to receive the appointment letter while holidaying in Greece. He commented that he

scarcely knew where was the colony and certainly nothing about it…The offer was very nearly forthwith refused, so ridiculous did it appear to me.

(Freudenberg 381)

Lord Beauchamp was only 27 years old when he arrived in May 1899. He made a few well publicised blunders during his term but also gained respect from Government Ministers and the public by his dedication to this high office.

This paper explores how far the Governor was prepared to yield to the Premier’s ambitions and what to expect from a subordinate position to the Governor General. Concurrent with State Government concerns about gaining a dominant position in a federal union, the future of the imperial relationship had to be established when the status of the Governor was downgraded.

Proposed celebrations for inauguration of the Commonwealth

Queen Victoria gave royal assent to the Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Act on 9th July 1900 (Evans, Moore, Saunders, and Jamison 281). It obviously spurred the Premier to apply pressure on the Colonial Office for the State to take a prominent part in the inauguration of Federation. Lord Beauchamp was instructed to telegram the Colonial Secretary, Joseph Chamberlain, to advise
that in order to celebrate properly establishment of the Commonwealth, New South Wales intend to promote great public rejoicing here on the arrival of the Governor General (AJCP 17 Jul. 1900).

The telegram further advised that the Premier wished Lord Beauchamp to entertain the Governor General from the time of arrival and Governors of all federating Colonies for the week of celebrations. The Governor should also vacate Government House so that it was ready for the Governor General by the time of the first session of Federal Parliament. The week following this telegram, Sir William Lyne submitted to Parliament

a bill altering the position and salary and allowances of the Governor to take effect from the establishment of the Commonwealth (AJCP 17 Jul. 1900).

The Colonial Office was not impressed with the proposed arrangements. They doubted whether Lord Beauchamp realised that it might take months to arrange the first Parliament. Writs had to be issued and returned, and a program arranged. The Premier's proposal for the Governor to entertain the Governor General for two weeks or so before the ceremony and thereafter, and also host five Governors for the week of celebrations, was considered quite unconscionable. In addition, the Governor was expected to vacate Government House and accept a reduced salary from the establishment of the Commonwealth! The Colonial Office pointed out the undesirable nature of the request but advised the Governor that it was his decision whether he would participate on this basis. If so, he should request a special allowance for the hospitality accorded (AJCP 17 Jul. 1900). Lord Beauchamp had to evaluate his obligations to high office against his personal disillusionment in a subordinate role with downgraded benefits.

A Residence for the Governor General

Lord Beauchamp would have been aware by late 1899 that Government House could be seconded for the Governor General’s residence. On 10th August, a Colonial Office despatch drew attention to Section 125 of the Commonwealth Bill that provided Parliament should sit at Melbourne and sought views from the Colonies on the location of the Governor General’s residence. South Australia and Tasmania considered it was logical to house the Governor General in Melbourne and Victoria was prepared to offer their Government House for this purpose. A response from Queensland to a despatch of 3rd November, after it agreed to federate, stated it had no objection to either Sydney or Melbourne (AJCP 1 Jun. 1900). New South Wales pointed out that Section 125 did not make provision for the Governor General’s residence and only required the Federal Parliament to meet in Melbourne until the seat of Government was established. Accordingly, the Governor General should be received first in Sydney and reside in Melbourne only when the Federal Parliament was in session. New South Wales undertook to provide a suitable residence at all other times (AJCP 27 Sep. 1899).
This subject was raised again at the Premiers' Conference, held in Sydney from 24th January 1900 (SMH 25 Jan. 1900, 7). It soon became clear that there were two contenders to provide the residence for the Governor General—New South Wales and Victoria. The Conference did not wish to see this subject escalate into a public wrangle and decided to pass responsibility for a decision to the Imperial authorities. A Colonial Office internal briefing paper of 1st June 1900 used the replies to their despatches of 10th August and 3rd November 1899, noted above, to consider their recommendations. Their opinion was that the Governor General must reside close to the headquarters of the Government and on a temporary basis that would be Melbourne. Eventually the permanent legislature must be located in New South Wales, more than 100 miles from Sydney, to comply with Section 125 of the Bill. This feature, combined with New South Wales as the Mother Colony with the largest population, swayed the Colonial Office to agree with their proposal, outlined above.

While Colonial Office officials may have favoured the New South Wales proposal they did not commit themselves to the Colony in June 1900. The Premier had become quite agitated, as he was being pressured by Parliament to disclose telegrams about the use of Government House (SMH 12 Jul. 1900, 8). Lord Beauchamp implied this distress in his telegram of 16th July:

I have thrice telegraphed to you asking for permission 30 June 5 July and 7 July… Grave inconvenience has been caused to the Prime Minister… (AJCP 16 Jul. 1900).

Lyne had also instructed Agent General Copeland in London to lobby the Colonial Secretary for a favourable decision (SMH 2 Aug. 1905, 5). In the meantime, the Colonial Secretary had been seeking the attitude of the Delegates in London for the Constitution Bill but they wanted to consult their Governments. Only Tasmania confirmed that they had no objection to the Governor General residing in New South Wales when the Federal Parliament was not in session (AJCP 7 Jul. 1900). Consequently, the Colonial Office gave a guarded response to quell the Premier's anxiety:

The Governor-General will be sworn-in and the Commonwealth inaugurated at Sydney, and if the other colonies have agreed to his omission of residing there (in Melbourne) during the parliament recess, her Majesty’s Government will not object… (SMH 18 Jul. 1900, 8).

The Premier was happy that the Governor General would land first in Sydney and took the cautious answer to residence in the recess as approval.

It did not completely resolve the matter. The Government needed to know if the Governor General wished to have Government House vacant on his arrival or Lord Beauchamp to remain for the inauguration. The reply upset the Premier again! Lord Hopetoun preferred to

leave his carriage and establishment at Melbourne and visit Sydney as … guest of the Governor (AJCP 8 Aug. 1900).

He was prepared to occupy Government House if Lord Beauchamp desired to leave early. Lord Beauchamp was instructed by Premier Lyne to advise the Colonial Office:
that would be so unpopular here if the Governor General decided to set up his establishment in Melbourne first (AJCP 12 Aug. 1900).

Beauchamp’s telegram went on to say that colonial legal opinion interpreted Section 125 as meaning

that the Governor General must reside in New South Wales till the meeting of Parliament about March otherwise the actions of the Executive may be insufficient. (AJCP 12 Aug. 1900)

The Colonial Office reply suggested that it was unreasonable to expect the Governor General to remain in Sydney during hot weather in February and March and he proposed to spend time … visiting Southern Colonies during this period (AJCP 18 Aug. 1900).

They pointed out that Section 126 allowed the Governor General to appoint a Deputy for business purposes. The Colonial Office ignored a further telegram protest by the Premier for the Governor General to remain in Sydney, advising that visits to the other Colonies should go ahead (AJCP 22 Aug. 1900). In view of the potential delay with the opening of Parliament, the Premier agreed that the Governor could leave before the Governor General arrived. Lord Beauchamp decided to return to England in November 1900.

**ESTABLISHING THE STATUS AND SALARY OF POST-FEDERATION GOVERNORS**

There was constant political pressure to reduce the cost of Vice-Regal representation in New South Wales during the 1890s. Lord Jersey’s resignation letter in 1892 mentioned that legislatures of several Colonies had been asked to reduce the salaries of their Governors (BL 43560).

When Lord Hampden was appointed in 1895, his salary was maintained at £7,000 but he had to pay for two personal staff out of this figure (AJCP 22 Apr. 1895). The British House of Commons was also questioning the cost of representation and suggested it would be cheaper to allow the Chief Justice in each Colony to undertake the Vice-Regal role. It was passed off as a matter for consideration at Federation (AJCP 24 May 1895). Certainly, the Colonies were seriously considering the opportunity to reduce Governors’ salaries from the inauguration of the Commonwealth. The Governor of South Australia, Lord Tennyson, informed the Colonial Secretary in 1899 that it was anticipated his salary of £4,000 would be reduced to £3,000 or even £2,500 for the next appointment. He claimed to live economically but still spent £7,000 per annum and could not see how the appointment of a Governor General would greatly alter the situation in South Australia (CO 881).

The salary and status of Governors was a major issue for the Premiers’ Conference of 24th January 1900. This subject had become quite a sensitive matter during earlier debates on the Federal Constitution and opponents of Federation argued strongly that it was intolerable to carry the expense of a Governor General in addition to the Vice-Regal structure existing in the Colonies. The response to this objection was that there would be corresponding savings in State arrangements to
compensate for the forecast expenditure. The Premiers recognised that they had to address this matter within the coming months but admitted there were practical problems. It was acknowledged that people were inclined to misjudge the Governor’s ‘salary’ and did not understand the demands upon his remuneration. This was especially the case with Lord Jersey

whose entertainments were on so exceeding generous a scale that money he received from the Colony was quite insignificant (SMH 25 Jan. 1900, 7).

It was also known that Lord Hopetoun and Lord Brassey, as Victorian Governors, spent two to three times more than their salary (CO 881). The Premiers believed that important occasions in future would most likely be hosted by the Governor General and overseas visitors would not expect such lavish hospitality from State Governors. There was consensus within the meeting that many issues previously handled locally would be transferred to the Governor General and consequently there should be a reduction in the Governor’s salary. Each State had to decide what action should be taken but it should be made known that Governors would not be expected to exceed their salaries for entertainment purposes (SMH 25 Jan. 1900, 7).

After further local consideration, the Governments of Western Australia (CO 881), Tasmania (CO 881), and Queensland (AJCP 7 Jul. 1900) decided not to reduce the salary of their Governors for the time being. They considered that the Governor General would have only a marginal effect on their Vice-Regal activities, and expenses would be unlikely to decrease in such circumstances. While Sir William Lyne suggested privately to the Colonial Secretary, via the Agent General, that he expected Victoria and South Australia would reduce their Governors’ salary, he had an alternative approach for his State (AJCP 30 Jul. 1900). He believed that if the Governor General, Lord Hopetoun, was also appointed Governor of New South Wales, Parliament could be persuaded to allow the present salary and allowances to remain unaltered. The Colonial Office was dismayed at such a proposal, which would bring vigorous objections from the other States about conflict of interest between the two roles. When the Colonial Secretary declined to support this approach, Sir William Lyne proceeded with his legislation to reduce the Governor’s salary to £5,000. The Colonial Office decided they could not press their objections as Lord Beauchamp had advised that the Governor of the State would be able to live on the reduced salary in a smaller Government House planned by the Government (AJCP 30 Jul. 1900). In a telegram to Mr. Chamberlain, Lord Beauchamp expressed his attitude to the revised terms:

…Change of residence and still more loss of influence and dignity which must come after federation are much greater arguments against remaining, though reduction in salary and allowances will be not less than £3,000 per annum (AJCP 2 Aug. 1900).
The New South Wales Government may have adopted a resolute position on salary and residence for the Governor after Federation, but it was relaxed about Britain’s retaining the right to make Vice-Regal appointments (Twomey 28). There was some talk in the Colonies about appointing a local man to the position as a reward for distinguished public service but in political circles there was strong resistance to such an idea. It was felt that a colonial appointment would create ‘prejudices and jealousies’ and detract from the dignity of the office (SMH 23 Aug. 1900, 6). The Adelaide Register bluntly suggested

the incumbent of the office would have gained his prominence through close association with partisan politics, and would not be regarded without suspicion (CO 881).

On the other hand, the Premiers believed the appointment of Governors by Britain was important to maintain the close connection with the Mother Country and ensure impartiality of the office (AJCP 25 Jul. 1900). This independent link upheld the sovereignty issue which would be weakened with a local appointment (Twomey 30). Additionally, it was believed that when a Governor returned to England he was a good advocate for the Colony (SMH 23 Aug. 1900, 6).

The downgraded status of the Governor meant that the posting would not be so attractive for the appointment of a ‘wealthy’ peer. Consequently, the British Government took the view that State Governors should be appointed from retired military or civilians with political connections because the role was considered more ‘ceremonial’ than ‘operational’ (Twomey 28). The Premiers wanted it to be understood that State Governors would not be expected to entertain beyond their salaries (AJCP 25 Jul. 1900).

Conclusion

There were some concerns in Britain that progress to Federation in the 1890s was also the path to separation from the Empire. The constant budgetary threats to Vice-Regal salaries and press comment about local appointment for the Governor’s office were seen as moves towards independence (Trainor 156). When Lord Jersey sent his letter of resignation in 1892 and referred to pressure from Colonial Legislatures for revision of Governors’ remuneration, he described it as ‘a wind for shift at present, blowing in this direction’ (BL 43560). It was clearly the implicit duty of the Governor to dispel such thoughts of autonomy as he engaged with political leaders and the community. The Governor took the opportunity during social commitments to impress upon all parties the relationship with Britain and the value of the Royal Navy to provide security for the Colonies and keep the trade routes open.
The Premiers’ Conference of January 1900 would have been some comfort to British observers. Certainly the negative features of potentially lower salaries for Governors and vacating Government House in Sydney and Melbourne may have given the impression that they were not indispensable. On the other hand, all the Premiers agreed that Britain should still have the authority to make future Vice-Regal appointments to the States. This link was important as the States would not want to see their Governor’s status eroded by a local appointment. In fact, the smaller States of Queensland, Western Australia and Tasmania subsequently decided that Governors’ salaries would remain unaltered for the time being as their duties should not be seriously affected by the Governor General’s activities.

The Premier, Sir William Lyne, recognised the precarious situation for New South Wales if he allowed the Governor General to reside full time in Melbourne. This city was the temporary seat of Federal Government and gradually all the important functions of a national capital would develop in Victoria. The permanent seat of Government might be in New South Wales in the distant future but by that stage Melbourne would have a dominant position that would be almost impossible to overhaul. Therefore it was essential that Sydney share the immediate prize of Federation by being recognised as the regular home of the leading citizen, the Governor General.

Unfortunately, Lord Beauchamp was an obstacle in the way of the ambitions of the Premier, Sir William Lyne, to promote New South Wales in the new Commonwealth era. As the Governor lamented in his telegram of 2nd August 1900, ‘the loss of influence and dignity’ would have been difficult to accept. He would have to make way for the Governor General at many functions that would be held in Sydney where the Governor had previously been the centre of attention.

As events unfolded, Sir Frederick Darley was again sworn in on 2nd November 1900 as Lieutenant Governor and carried out this role until the first State Governor, Admiral Sir Harry Rawson, arrived on 27th May 1902.
Works Cited

AJCP=Australian Joint Copy Project.
BL=British Library.
CO=Colonial Office.
ML=Mitchell Library.
PRO=Public Record Office.
SMH=Sydney Morning Herald.