

A Capital Day

By Roslyn Hull

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- The Queanbeyan Age 14 March 1913
- The Chronicle (Adelaide) 15 March 1913

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Cast:

Prime Minister Andrew Fisher

Lord Denman, Governor-General of Australia

Lady Denman, his wife

The Honourable King O'Malley, Minister for Home Affairs

Mr. Cook and

Mr. Hughes (Members of Parliament)

Mrs. Brassey and

Mrs. Kaye (locals)

Crowd

The action takes place on Kurrajong Hill (now know as Capital Hill, the site of the Australian Parliament House). The foundation stone of the Commencement Column forms the focal point of all activity; the three plaques lay close by ready to be laid. A nearby table holds three ceremonial trowels and a 'golden casket' (a small box). MR. COOK stands to one side, shielding his eyes as he looks of. MRS. BRASSEY and MRS. KAYE stand on the other side, looking in the same direction. The CROWD is arranged behind the stone.

MRS. BRASSEY: Goodness that salute with the artillery guns was loud!

MRS. KAYE: I know Mrs Brassey but aren't the young light horsemen handsome?

MRS. BRASSEY: Yes, and it does my heart good whenever we sing 'God Save the King'.

MR. HUGHES enters.

MR. HUGHES: The Governor-General is reviewing the troops from Duntroon with the Prime Minister.

MR. COOK: First they travelled to Queanbeyan by train, then here by motor car and now they are walking. What a day!

MR. O'MALLEY enters and goes to MR. COOK and MR. HUGHES.

MR. O'MALLEY: Is everything in readiness?

MR. COOK: There is still the question of the correct pronunciation

MR. HUGHES: I like it said ...

MR. O'MALLEY: *(cutting him off)* No sir, it is agreed, whichever way Lady Denman says it will be correct for all time.

MRS. BRASSEY: I hope the question of the name is resolved with 'Canberra' – why change our name?

MRS. KAYE: Yes, to Democratia, Eucalyptia – or worse still, Myola. How will our Capital survive if it has a silly name?

The PRIME MINISTER, GOVERNOR-GENERAL and LADY DENMAN arrive.

PM FISHER: *(raising his top hat)* Greetings all on this glorious March morning.

The CROWD applauds enthusiastically.

PM FISHER: Ladies and gentlemen! I now invite his Excellency the Governor-General to lay the foundation stone of this column on behalf of the people of Australia.

The CROWD cheers.

The GOVERNOR GENERAL collects a trowel and taps his plaque gently into place.

GOVERNOR GENERAL: I declare this first stone of the commencement column well and truly laid.

The CROWD cheers enthusiastically.

O'MALLEY: I am going to ask the Prime Minister of the Commonwealth of Australia to lay the second foundation stone.

The CROWD cheers again, someone calls out 'Good boy Andy'. The PRIME MINISTER collects a trowel and taps his plaque gently into place.

PM FISHER: This second stone of the first column of the Federal city is well and truly laid.

The CROWD cheers again, MR. O'MALLEY steps forward, thumbs in his waistcoat pockets and puffed up proudly. He beams at the crowd. Nothing happens. The CROWD look at one another, not sure what they should do.

MR. O'MALLEY: I'm laying a stone too.

The CROWD understands and cheers. He taps his stone into place. He looks expectantly at the CROWD. They look back, then realise what he is waiting for and cheer again.

MR. O'MALLEY: I declare this stone well and permanently laid and I invite Lady Gertrude Denman to announce the name of our planned Federal Capital.

All the gentlemen then step back from the stone and LADY DENMAN, carrying a small golden case, steps up to the stone. MRS. BRASSEY and MRS. KAYE grasp each other's hands.

MRS. BRASSEY *and* MRS. KAYE *together*: This is it.

LADY DENMAN *opens the box and takes out a slip of paper. The CROWD breathes in again and leans forward, all together. LADY DENMAN clears her throat.*

LADY DENMAN: I name the capital city of Australia Canberra.

LADY DENMAN *nods slightly and smiles at MR. HUGHES and MR. COOK, they nod approvingly back. MRS. BRASSEY and MRS. KAYE are bouncing up and down whilst still trying to appear ladylike.*

MRS. BRASSEY *and* MRS. KAYE *together*: Hooray! Hooray!

PM FISHER: I call for a cheer for her Excellency Lady Denman for naming the capital city. Hip, hip -

CROWD: Hooray!

PM FISHER: I ask for a cheer for his Excellency the Governor General for coming to lay the first stone.

The CROWD starts to cheer but he interrupts.

PM FISHER: I ask for a cheer for the success and progress of Australia.

The CROWD starts to cheer but the GOVERNOR-GENERAL interrupts.

GOVERNOR GENERAL: I call for a cheer for the Prime Minister.

PM FISHER *gestures to stop the crowd.*

PM FISHER: You will embarrass me your Excellency. *(He raises his top hat)* God save the King!

CROWD: *(finally allowed to cheer)* Hooray! Hooray! Hooray! *(General tossing of hats in the air)*

The GOVERNOR GENERAL bows graciously. MR. O'MALLEY starts to gently round the official guests up as military orders can be heard being called out off stage (EG: Attention! Look lively lads! Order arms!).

MR. O'MALLEY: Just one more review of the troops to go – and it wouldn't do to keep General Bridges waiting. Oh, and the 21 gun salute!

LADY DENMAN: *(delicately covering her ears)* And then lunch I do believe?

MR. O'MALLEY: A fine lunch your Excellency, in the marquees just yonder.

The official party moves off stage, MR COOK and MR HUGHES follow

MR. DEAKIN: What a splendid morning.

MR. COOK: A capital day! *(Raises his hat, the CROWD applauds once more and bursts into 'Advance Australia Fair')*

THE END

Props:

- The foundation of the Commencement Column: a large hexagonal shape. This can be as simple as cardboard or as robust as a platform (we used stacked fence palings)
- 3 metallic 'trowels' (cake servers would do). These could be covered in gold foil
- 3 'plaques'. These could be pieces of A4 card either blank, printed with the actual stone images or decorated (we mounted the printed sheets on card with Velcro dots on the back. These were then attached to acrylic bookstands - library displays use these - which had another Velcro dot in place so the stones could be 'laid').
- A small table to hold the above items
- Extra stage dressing: an Australian flag on a stand, red, white and blue bunting or streamers

Costumes:

- Actors could just wear hats to denote who they are
- There are several photos available online of the ceremony. The one accompanying this play is one of the clearer versions.
- Basic dress:
 - Lady Denman: 1913 day dress, big hat
 - Mrs Brassey, Mrs Kaye: more humble versions of Lady Denman's dress
 - Lord Denman: military dress
 - PM Fisher: morning coat and top hat
 - Mr Cook and Mr Hughes: suits and bowler hats
 - Mr O'Malley: he actually forgot to pack his formal suit so he should look a little rumpled
 - Beard (for O'Malley) and moustaches add to the sense of history