



Enduring foundation

The nation's capital recalls the historic day when it became our meeting place.

It could have been Kangaremu or Eucalypta if some of the more unusual suggestions had been taken up. But at midday on 12 March 1913, on dusty limestone plains, Canberra was born at a naming ceremony held beside an imposing six-sided foundation stone.

One hundred years on and much has changed as Australia's capital has grown from those once desolate sheep paddocks into a thriving city of 360,000 people.

But it was next to the same foundation stone at the front of Parliament House that the current Prime Minister Julia Gillard spoke about the significance of Canberra's history and the wisdom of the nation's forefathers in choosing an Aboriginal name for the new capital.

"Though Canberra has several meanings, the one we settle upon is 'meeting place' as if the meeting place of the new Australia could only recognise and rest upon the old," Ms Gillard said.

"The naming of Canberra completed a remarkable quartet of events – the idea, the site, the plan, the name.

"The idea owed its debt to Washington DC so this is a day to honour our abiding friendship with the United States. Like its elder

city Canberra was a neat solution to a federal dilemma, placing the capital outside any one state and thus belonging to every state."

Back then it was Lady Trudie Denman, wife of the then Governor-General Lord Thomas Denman, who revealed the chosen name to 500 dignitaries, 700 troops and several thousand onlookers. A century later, it was Australia's first female Governor-General Quentin Bryce who spoke of how her 1913 counterpart had stood in the same spot and paid a tongue in cheek tribute to the famously eccentric and teetotal Home Affairs Minister of the time King O'Malley.

"He acknowledged the need for the necessary creation of a national Australian spirit, and concluded with words about the city's future that are as eloquent and deeply stirring today as they must have been one hundred years ago," Ms Bryce said.

"He said 'the city that is to be should have a splendid destiny before it, but the making of that destiny lies in your hands, the hands of your children and those who come after them. Remember that the traditions of this city will be the traditions of Australia'."

And echoing the ceremony of 1913, Ms Bryce called upon her

own spouse, Michael Bryce, to join her at the podium to provide the correct pronunciation of the capital's chosen name.

Mr Bryce said the pragmatic decision made was that whatever pronunciation Lady Denman used on the day would become the official version.

"And so it was, as the history books inform us, on this centenary day, Canberra it remains."

ACT Chief Minister Katy Gallagher led a toast in honour of Canberra as "a city with two lives – firstly as the purpose-built capital of the nation, the other our home".

"We are proud of our nation's capital, we are proud of our home, we are proud of what has been achieved in our first 100 years, and we are excited about the next," Ms Gallagher said.

Following three cheers, the guests entered parliament to watch the first screening of the National Film and Sound Archives' digitally-restored historic film from the 1913 naming ceremony, leaving the foundation stone where it all began to stand solid for the century ahead. •

Canberra centenary events continue throughout the year. For more information visit: www.canberra100.com.au