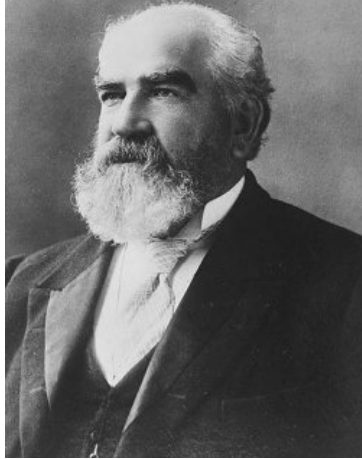


## Life of Nicholas John Brown (1838 - 1903)

by Gordon Rimmer

<http://adbonline.anu.edu.au/biogs/A030243b.htm>



Nicholas John Brown (1838 - 1903), by unknown photographer, 1898, courtesy of National Library of Australia. nla.pic-an21399820-24 . .

[Image Details](#)

BROWN, NICHOLAS JOHN (1838-1903), pastoralist, mining agent and politician, was born on 9 October 1838 in Hobart Town, the eldest son of Richard Brown, cooper, who arrived in Tasmania in 1833 and became a storekeeper in Hobart. Nicholas was educated at St Andrews and Hutchins Schools, and in 1852 became a farm worker in the Richmond district. He spent 1857 on a cattle station in Victoria and returned to manage his brother-in-law's property at Richmond and then [Philip Smith](#)'s Syndal estate at Ross. After his marriage in 1870 to Ellen, the daughter of Henric Nicholas, a landowner in the Ouse district, Brown rented and later bought Meadow Bank at Hamilton and also bought the Macclesfield property near Lake Echo. He retained his interests in pastoral farming until 1891.

Brown was elected to the Tasmanian House of Assembly in 1875 as the member for Cumberland and was returned unopposed in the next four elections. From 1877-78 and again from 1882-87 he was minister for lands and works in five ministries at a salary of £700 and then £900. As minister he secured the passage of Mining Acts in 1883 and 1884 dealing with licences, leases and miners' rights, created the position of secretary of mines, and secured the adoption of a Railway Act in 1883. After defeating an opponent in the 1891 election Brown was chosen Speaker of the assembly, and at the same time started business in Hobart as an agent and attorney for many West Coast mining companies. In a poll on 19 December 1893 Brown was defeated by a Zeehan solicitor who carried the growing Zeehan vote at a time when the division of the Cumberland electorate was awaiting royal assent. Because of irregularities at the Zeehan poll the result was challenged and in February 1894 the Supreme Court declared the election void. The electorate was divided before new elections were held and Brown was returned unopposed for Cumberland. In 1897 he was narrowly re-elected Speaker and again but more easily in 1900 and 1903. He was a 'large, florid, massive man', referred to as 'Buffalo Brown'. As Speaker he was very

capable and dignified; as a politician he was considered sound and made few enemies. He helped to obtain numerous roads, ferries and services for the booming West Coast mining district, and in many ways was typical of the new breed of native sons who believed in a bright future for Tasmania.

From the 1880s Brown was one of the main supporters of Federation in Tasmania. In 1884 his Town Hall lecture, *Federation of the Colonies*, was published and followed by another on the same topic to the Mechanics' Institute next year. In 1896 his lecture to the Bellerive Literary and Debating Society was published and in 1900 he produced a pamphlet on *Federal Finance*. The premier appointed Brown one of Tasmania's representatives to the Federal Council in 1886, a position which he had to resign in 1887 but held again in 1892-94. In October 1890 Brown was appointed one of the House of Assembly's delegates to the first Federal Convention in 1891 and was elected to attend the later ones in 1897-98. His support for Federation was based not so much on its commercial advantages as on a vision of national destiny within the empire. As a member of the Southern Tasmanian Federal League he sought to gain acceptance of the Commonwealth bill by Tasmanian electors.

In 1900-03 Brown was recommended at least four times for a knighthood in recognition of his political services; the Colonial Office thought him worthy but delayed action because of the new federal system. He played a leading role in local affairs as a member of the University Council from its inception in 1890, trustee of the Museum and Art Gallery, magistrate, president of the Southern Tasmanian Agricultural and Pastoral Society, and as a director of the Australian Mutual Provident Society in Hobart. He died without issue on 22 September 1903.

### Select Bibliography

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