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Julia Marion Harvey Hale: Victoria's most prominent woman sawmiller

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Introduction

In Victoria, sawmilling has historically been a profession almost entirely dominated by men. It is true that some women did run sawmills, but these were isolated instances, and most were as a result of the death of a husband or in conjunction with sons. All were small businesses run only to benefit the immediate family.¹ There was, however, one woman sawmiller who, if she was not the biggest player in the industry, was at least competitive with her male peers and ran a number of sawmills concurrently (Figure 1). Moreover, she stood her ground against the Forests Commission which oversaw the profession and, by her bequest to the University of Melbourne's Department of Forestry, continues to influence forestry today. That sawmiller was Julia Marion Harvey Hale.

Julia Marion Harvey Hale

Julia Marion Harvey Hale was born at Kensington in South Australia on 19 August 1907.² She was the youngest child of Harold William Harvey Hale and Clara Amelia Rebecca Hale, neé Cook.³ Her siblings included brother Frederick William Harvey Hale (born in Sydney in 1899) and sisters Edith Mary Harvey Hale (born in Sydney in 1903) and Beatrice Ethel Harvey Hale (born in South Australia in 1906). Beatrice was the only one of the children to marry, becoming the wife of Robert Cecil Bald (1901-1965), Australian-born Professor of English at Cornell University and the University of Chicago.⁴

Julia Hale's father had obviously travelled widely in Australia, being in Sydney from 1899 to at least 1903 and South Australia by 1906, where Julia was born.⁵ In 1919, when Julia was twelve, the family moved to Victoria where her father was working as a commercial traveller and residing at 1 Grandview Street, Moonee Ponds.⁶ The family home was a comfortable Edwardian house, built of timber in a rather ornate fashion, and clearly middle-class.⁷ By 1924 Harold Hale listed his occupation as 'agent', a listing he maintained until at least 1937.⁸ Of the children, only Frederick and Julia had listed occupations in 1931 – Frederick as a warehouse assistant and Julia as a stenographer.⁹ It is therefore tempting to assume that Harold Hale had become a timber agent and that Julia Hale learnt her trade through the employ of her father. What is definite is that, around 1934, Julia Hale entered the sawmilling business in north-eastern Victoria with a single small sawmill on the tablelands south of Whitfield.¹⁰



Figure 1: Location of Julia Hale's Sawmills

Tablelands Sawmills (Whitfield) Pty Ltd

Tablelands Sawmills (Whitfield) Pty Ltd was registered on 20 April 1936 to formalise an agreement with Arthur Dye, sawmiller, and Ovens & King Traders as the vendors, and Reginald Harold Walford as the purchaser and trustee for the new Company. The purchaser was to acquire a sawmilling plant and the cutting rights on Crown land and private property from the vendors. The registered address of the Company was Julia Hale's offices at 127 William Street in Melbourne, and she held a substantial 25% shareholding in the new Company at a cost of £500, and the position of Company Secretary.¹¹ The Company's cutting area comprised nearly 1500 acres, being Crown land allotments 91 and 96, parish of Toombullup.¹² Arthur Dye was originally from Gembrook, but moved to north-east Victoria in the early 1930s. The mill had been on Boggy Creek since 1933, and was shifted to Fifteen Mile Creek in 1936 when the new Company was formed. It had cut out its site on Fifteen Mile Creek by 1937, the plant was then sold back to Arthur Dye, and later shifted to the Mansfield district, where it eventually became the property of DSM Sawmills.¹³ Julia Hale seems to have ceased her rather short-lived connection with Dye's operation with the sale of the mill in 1937.

A Tasmanian Adventure

In 1937, Julia Hale and her father were involved in a scheme to buy forested Crown land in Tasmania, lending further credence to the assumption of Harold Hale's involvement in the timber industry. The land totalled 6,000 acres near Lake Leake in the eastern midlands of Tasmania. The two Hales shared in one-fifth of this land in a ten-member consortium headed up by Tasmanian-born (but Victorian-based) sawmiller and grazier Arthur Garibaldi Newman. Under Tasmanian law, 600 acres was the maximum that could be selected by any one person at any one time, hence the number of investors. The land was ostensibly required for agricultural or pastoral purposes (with the removal of the timber to pay for the acquisition), but it was fairly clear that the consortium was really after the approximately thirty million super feet of timber growing there (to be converted at Newman's nearby Mt Foster Timber Company sawmill). At £2500, with payments spread over fourteen years, the land was a good buy, and would result in savings in royalty of between £12,500 and £25,000. Normally, such a sale would have been refused on the value of the timber after inspection by the Forestry Department, but it was approved in 1938 following alleged intervention by the Tasmanian Minister for Forests Mr Robert Cosgrove (from 1939 Premier of the State). This transaction and several by a number of other sawmillers would give rise to a Royal Commission into the Administration of Tasmanian Forestry in 1945, at which it was also alleged that a later Minister for Forests, Colonel Taylor, had been bribed to smooth the way for a further transaction with the Newman syndicate with the sum of £500 disguised as a wager over a horse race.¹⁴

The Royal Commission (the most expensive yet held in Tasmania) sat until May 1946 under Judge Kirby of the NSW district court, and took evidence in Melbourne from Arthur Newman and Julia Hale. It dismissed charges of systematic corruption, but did discover irregularities proven in nine out of the thirty-four allegations listed. Of the charges eventually laid, none related to the Newmans or the Hales, nor was the land at Lake Leake resumed by the Tasmanian government, despite the fact that it might have legally done so. The Royal Commission resulted in the creation of a Tasmanian Forestry Commission similar to that established in Victoria in 1919.¹⁵ In light of what was to follow, this may have fuelled Julia Hale's distaste for such organisations in future years.

The Myrree Saw Mill

In 1936, Julia Hale had formed a partnership with Victorian sawmiller James Moore.¹⁶ This was a more successful operation. Moore was an experienced sawmiller having spent ten years in the trade in the Gembrook district. The partners installed a mill on Fifteen Mile Creek north-west of the Tablelands Sawmill in August 1936 to cut timber off private property. The mill plant was powered by a 10nhp Garratt portable engine and was obtained from Gilderoy in the Little Yarra Valley. A total of £1500 was invested in the venture. Moore ran the operations of the sawmill while Hale, the controlling partner, oversaw the sales, marketing and financial side of the business. The business took its name from the nearest town and traded as Myrree Saw Mills.¹⁷ In May 1938, the mill was moved to a State Forest cutting area further south on Fifteen Mile Creek and the firm's first crawler tractor was purchased for the new logging area. The new cutting area proved to be too steep and rocky for the mill to make a profit, and Julia Hale had already applied for a new cutting area at Glen Wills when the bushfires of January 1939 called for a drastic reappraisal of priorities.¹⁸

The move to Toorong

Julia Hale was quick off the mark. On 20 February, with parts of the forest still smouldering, she lodged an application with the Victorian Forests Commission for a 1000 acre sawmilling site at the head of the West Tanjil River in the parish of Toorong. The timber on the site was fire-killed Mountain Ash (*Eucalyptus regnans*) and Woollybutt (*E.longifolia*). The plant was to be that currently situated on 15-Mile Creek, powered by the same 10nhp Garrett portable engine with a working pressure of 130psi. A total of £5000 was to be invested in the venture (including a steam-powered logging winch). The firm also had its existing crawler tractor which was valued at £2000. The application was approved in March 1939 and the mill was on site and operating by January 1940.¹⁹ Initially, the Forests Commission had proposed constructing a tramway system from the West Tanjil, which would have consisted of a long graded line terminating at an aerial ropeway above the West Tanjil River, from the foot of which a second lengthy grade tramway would lead out to the nearest trafficable road near Icy Creek.²⁰ This plan was quickly abandoned, and the Commission started to construct a road into the area suitable for motor trucks. This change of plan would have serious repercussions for the Myrree Saw Mill and others working in the area, which included John Sharp & Sons,²¹ Strahan & Davies,²² D. A. Stronach,²³ and Julia Hale's old Tasmanian colleague Arthur Garibaldi Newman.²⁴

Meanwhile, in December 1939, Julia Hale had already applied for a second sawmilling area just over the ridge from the existing mill and in the headwaters of the Thomson River. The timber was good-quality Mountain Ash, Woollybutt and Shining Gum (*Eucalyptus nitens*), all fire-killed. This was to be a new plant sited north of the existing West Tanjil mill and consisting of a 16nhp Marshall engine with a working pressure of 120psi, twin breaking-down saws, a rip bench and a mosquito saw. The timber was to be exported by road to Noojee railway station. Part of the plant was still at Whitfield and part was already at Noojee. A total of £5000 was to be invested in the project. Julia Hale's application was approved on 5 February 1940, and the mill was set up and ready to commence cutting by November of that year.²⁵ In January 1940, the northern portion of Block 9 was added to the mill's logging area.²⁶ With Jim Moore away at the war, the Myrree mills were managed by Tommy Nott. Life at the mills

was hard, with little in the way of entertainment, and the mill children had only a little one-roomed building - the Mt Horsfall school - for their education.²⁷

By this time, the financial pressures on the venture were starting to show. In July 1940, Julia Hale applied to the Forests Commission for a salvage loan of £1000. In her application she noted that the road to the mills would not be completed until the end of 1940. In the meantime, the mill was stacking sawn timber in readiness for the time when the road would be finished. In March 1940 some of this timber was accidentally burnt and, while it was insured, any profit on it would be lost. Julia Hale offered as security for the loan her crawler tractor valued at £2000. The Forests Commission professed itself as happy with this. Forest Economist Arch Shillinglaw noted that 'Miss Hale is an excellent miller who has overcome great difficulties in mill construction and is operating in the most isolated milling area in Victoria'. The loan was quickly approved.

When Julia Hale discovered that the lien over the crawler tractor would have to be published in the trade press, she changed her mind, fearing that her credit standing would be adversely affected. She would settle for a loan of £500 without the lien. This was also approved. However, when she later discovered that the Commission's new road (which had to serve a number of mills in the area) would miss her mills by one mile and that she would have to construct a mile of outlet road from the No.1 mill using her own resources, she was forced to apply for a second loan of £500 in September 1940. The Forests Commission was happy to approve this, because Julia Hale was supplying sawn timber to the Commission's seasoning works at Newport. Payments could be assured by deductions from the amount paid for the timber. This loan too was approved.

Unfortunately, the bad news continued to roll in. A shortage of labour caused by the Second World War was exacerbated by the remoteness of the mill and the difficult living conditions at a little over 1000 metres above sea level. Julia Hale was forced to conclude that a boarding house must be constructed to serve the two mills if she was to have any hope of attracting enough labour to run them. This would be expensive, and a further £300 would be required. She noted that she had already repaid £560 of the current loans and that, when enough labour was available, both mills would be working to capacity. This loan too was approved, but it was still not enough to stave off impending disaster. Seasonal road closures and a continuing shortage of labour led to the closure of the No.1 mill in May 1942. The men from this mill would be put to work constructing new haulage tracks and shifting the No.1 mill winch.²⁸ By this time Julia Hale was already showing her disdain for local forest officers which would be a hallmark of her later operations, preferring instead to deal directly with the Commissioners.²⁹

It was at this time that the first Commission reservations about the Myrree sawmill's capacity to cope with prevailing conditions began to creep in. Forester E. R. Torbet reported to the Commission that both mills were too small and underpowered for the task at hand. Only 10,000,000 super feet HLW had been salvaged since operations began in late 1940, too little to keep pace with the rate with which the timber was deteriorating. While the company was obtaining additional winches with which to haul timber for the mills, lack of personnel was a controlling factor. Julia Hale's stated plans were adequate for the task ahead but, as Torbet put it, 'one loses confidence in their fulfilling any proposals set out'. As a result of this assessment, Julia Hale had a portion of her allotment excised and given to case log contractors in October 1942.

A second crawler tractor, a Cletrac 60 DDH, was purchased in September 1946, and the one remaining Myrree mill struggled on, increasingly relying on the sale of logs taken direct to Noojee and less and less on sawn timber produced at the West Tanjil mill as Julia Hale's new sawmills at Milawa and Nariel swung into production. The West Tanjil area was considered cut-out in May 1950 and all of the Myrree Sawmill's rights in that area were cancelled. However, the fallout from the salvage loans continued to cause friction between Julia Hale and the Forests Commission. By 1953 the Commission believed that there was £60-15s-7d still owing on the loans due to short deliveries of timber to

Newport. Julia Hale considered the total amount had been paid off by deductions from deliveries of timber made to Newport, and that all of the timber had been delivered. An increasingly terse exchange of letters led to Julia Hale referring the Commission to her solicitors for any further discussion. By 1961, the Commission had given up, writing off the amount owing and closing the loan account.³⁰

There is probably good reason to believe that the Forests Commission had contributed to the confusion. With payments to the Commission spread over at least three forest districts, deductions being made for the falling of 'culls', manipulating payments for timber received at Newport in repayment of the salvage loans, and calculations of timber volumes being made at the mill, at Noojee railway station and at Newport, there was certainly room for confusion.³¹ Add to this the shortage of Forests Commission personnel caused by the war, and errors were almost inevitable. Unfortunately, the affair had started to drive a wedge between the two parties which would eventually erupt into all-out war in 1957.

Emu Valley Saw Mill

The Emu Valley Saw Mill had its genesis in a small mill on private property in the parish of Carboor owned by W. E. Flanigan. Like Julia Hale's early mills, this one too had started life at Myrree. In January 1948, Flanigan applied for a Crown land logging area in the headwaters of Emu Creek near Milawa. By July 1948, it was clear to the Forests Commission that Julia Hale would be providing the money for the new operation. The partners had a full mill plant including a 16nhp Ruston & Hornsby steam engine, and had on hire, a Cletrac bulldozer to begin roading operations in Emu Valley. The mill was erected in the township of Milawa. However, by the end of 1949 it was apparent that Flanigan was very much the junior partner in the business, and had been reduced to working as a truck driver for the mill. In November 1950, he wrote to tell the Forests Commission that he was retiring to Queensland because of ill-health, and that he wished all of his licences to be transferred into the name of Julia Hale, who was now trading as the Emu Valley Saw Mill.³²

The Milawa mill burnt down early in the morning of 19 June 1951. It had only been in operation for two and a half years.³³ It took six months to get the mill back into production, and the Emu Valley logging rights were formally transferred into the name of Julia Hale in late 1951, just as the mill was getting ready to re-start. At this time, relationships between Julia Hale and the Commission were still on a cordial basis; she held face-to-face meetings with the Commissioners in matters relating to royalty payments, and the Commission extended help with the loan of pumps when a culvert on the mill's logging road became blocked. In particular, Julia Hale seems to have had a good working relationship with Commissioner Alf Lawrence. Even Finton George 'Gerry' Gerraty, Chairman of Commissioners, wrote a letter strongly supporting Julia Hale when she sought Commonwealth Bank funding in 1953 for a tour to North America to study the latest developments in logging and sawmilling techniques and machinery.³⁴ As we shall see, this support would not stand the test of time and subsequent events.

By 1953, the Emu Creek catchment had been cut out and the mill was given a clearance to transfer its operations to the Mansfield district, a move which seems to have never eventuated.

A new mill at Nariel

During the war, Julia Hale had been the Secretary of the Forests & Timber Industries Comforts Fund, and was present at a ceremony to temporarily welcome back to Melbourne members of the AIF Forestry Group on their way from the UK to the Pacific in November 1943.³⁵ This group included her old mill manager James Moore and her future bush-boss Clarence 'Gus' Brew. In the same year, Julia Hale learnt from Corryong cattlemen, the Gibsons, of the existence of large stands of old-growth timber near Mount Pinnibar. Given that she was on the way to completing the salvage of a large

amount of timber at West Tanjil, she could have her pick of a new site. With the war over and James Moore and Gus Brew now in her employ, Gus was directed to go and look at the timber. He estimated there was 40 million super feet HLV to be obtained, and surveyed a route by which the timber could be removed from the forest to a new mill sited at the tiny settlement of Nariel.³⁶ Agreement as to the allocation of cutting rights was reached in September 1946. This agreement required Julia Hale to extend a logging road into the area at her own cost (the present day Dunstons Logging Road, built by Gus Brew in 1946-47). However, the Forests Commission was careful to maintain control of the first mile or so of road so that it could choke off access to the remainder at will. The logging road was started but, by February 1947, Julia Hale was again in financial difficulties, mostly due to the cost of the road and the expensive equipment required to construct it. She approached Minister of Forests Bill Barry and he arranged for the Forests Commission to assist her by paying her to construct the road as a contractor. The road was quickly completed, and the by now considerably-enlarged Myrree mill was shifted to Nariel where operations commenced in 1947 (Figure 2). The timber available to the firm was considered to include ten year's cutting at an annual log intake of four million super feet HLV of Alpine Ash (*Eucalyptus delegatensis*) (later reduced to three million as the actual cut never exceeded this amount).³⁷

The mill was situated in the narrow Nariel Creek Valley on leased private property on both sides of Carmody's Track. It was powered by a rather archaic-looking horizontal steam engine fed from a large underfired boiler burning sawdust from an overhead cyclone and hopper. Benches included a twin breaking-down saw and two rip benches. Extensive stacking areas were set out below the mill. Concrete seasoning kilns were provided, with a large former locomotive boiler (still on site in 1997) providing a source of steam.³⁸ Logging was undertaken using a fleet of Bedford trucks which proved very suitable for the task (Figure 3).³⁹



Figure 2: Nariel Myrree SMC mill April 1954. Source: State Library of Victoria a29124



Figure 3: Julia Hale in truck pre 1955. Source: Ruth Ure

The Nariel mill was the enterprise that finally made Julia Hale prosperous. Gone were the days of knitting jackets for babies at night to pay the rent on her office. With James Moore and Gus Brew looking after the mill and the bush respectively, she had the right people in the right place at the right time, the right timber, and the right technology. The post-war boom was in full swing, and the mill had valuable contracts providing sawn timber seasoned on site to the Federal Government, with a lot of the output being dispatched direct to Canberra.

By this time Julia Hale was in her early forties and in the prime of her life, and made regular visits to the Nariel mill in her white 'Silver Cloud' Rolls Royce, often accompanied by friends from Melbourne. She was of average height and slim build, with striking brown eyes and long brown hair, usually plaited on one side and arranged in a coil on her head. 'Miss Hale', as she was known to all, was always expensively and fashionably dressed in English tweeds and silk blouses and with sensible English brogues for her feet. She carried the air of a member of the English aristocracy equally at home in the city and the Australian bush. Always comfortable in the company of men, she nevertheless eschewed the slacks worn by the modern post-war woman and always wore skirts. She walked briskly and with purpose, often deep in conversation with her senior employees, and it seemed to the daughters of these men that everyone struggled to keep up with her. To these girls she was charismatic, lively, attractive, sophisticated and always interesting.

In turn, Julia took a great interest in the welfare of these girls, introducing them to literature through the books which were frequent presents at the mill Christmas parties. There were usually two parties, one for the men who worked at the mill and a separate party for the mill families and even some residents of local farms. All the children at the mill received presents personally selected by Julia Hale. The mill was her life and the people working for the mill were her family, and she treated them as such. Always a good networker, Julia Hale could arrange almost anything, be it a new refrigerator

desperately required by a mill family in the heat of summer, experimental antibiotics for a sick mill child, or even a special train to deliver much needed equipment (Figure 4). Despite her concern for others, Julia Hale was very much a private person. Although no-one would have ever directly enquired as to her interest in marriage and children, it was clear to all that she was put on earth for much more than that. Besides which, it was common opinion that no man would have been good enough for her.⁴⁰



Figure 4: Children from the mill with the school bus. No date. *Source:* Ruth Ure

The fight with the Forests Commission

From the start Julia Hale seems to have avoided direct dealings with her local district forester, who would have normally been the first point of contact for any sawmill. On her visits to the Nariel mill, Julia's Rolls Royce would sail through Tallangatta (where the district office was situated) without stopping. It was well known locally that her dealings would be direct with the Commissioners wherever possible.⁴¹ It seemed to those associated with the mill that Julia Hale almost regarded the Forests Commission as 'sport'. It may also have been that she had little tolerance for any bureaucrat who got in her way. She was a woman very much at home in a man's world, but would not stoop to lubricating the relationship with the odd case or ten of Scotch whisky delivered to a receptive address in Melbourne.⁴² This may or may not have had a bearing on what was to follow.

In 1952 further tension between Julia Hale and the Forests Commission was generated over the matter of who was to be responsible for measuring logs. Tardy royalty payments and alleged disregard of a Forest Officer's instructions fuelled the tension. In 1954 Julia Hale wrote a letter to her friend and MLA, Thomas Walter Mitchell that could only have been regarded as a stinging personal attack on Forests Commission Chairman Gerraty.⁴³ Mitchell was Julia Hale's local member, a prominent barrister and Corryong grazier, who held the seat of Benambra from 1947-1976. He was a political opponent of the Forests Commission with complaints against everything from logging trucks using Shire roads to the price of Christmas trees.⁴⁴

The matter was raised in Parliament and the Minister of Forests was forced to defend the Commission's actions to Premier John Cain.⁴⁵ This minor bickering escalated into a major dispute in early 1957 over Julia Hale's claim for a refund of royalty she claimed was overpaid because of an incorrect road classification under the equated royalty system. The Myrree mill was being charged a higher royalty for carting over a class 'B' road, while the Gibb mill was being charged a lower amount for carting over a class 'D' road. Both mills were in fact using the same road. This was no minor item,

the refund claimed being around £75,000.⁴⁶ The Forests Commission for its part claimed that Hale's logging was poorly planned, involved excessive snigging distances, and picked the eyes out of the forest in such a way as to tighten her grip over a monopoly on log supplies in the area. The Commissioners may also have considered Hale's challenge a slap in the face given their assistance to her throughout the 1940s.

A legal stand-off soon developed in respect to the royalty refund and, in 1960, Hale refused to sign the standard conditions laid down in the renewal of her annual logging allocation because she felt it may prejudice her claim. The Forests Commission refused to renew the allocation. On 24 March 1961, all falling was suspended at the Commission's direction. By August the mill had converted almost its entire winter log stockpile. By September, relations between the warring parties has cooled sufficiently for the allocation to be reinstated and logging to recommence.⁴⁷

In 1962 the dispute went to arbitration. The hearings commenced at Corryong, with Gus Brew giving evidence on behalf of the Company. Julia Hale attended the hearings but did not give evidence herself.⁴⁸ She engaged QC Dr Elias Godfrey Coppel to represent her whilst the Commission was represented by QC Jack O'Driscoll. Dr Coppel was able to convince Arbitrator Kandy (a civil engineer) that the road was 'D' class (little better than a bulldozer track). The result was a disaster for the Commission, with Julia Hale being awarded substantial compensation. An appeal by the Commission was unsuccessful, but the legal wound continued to fester until Julia Hale's death on 19 October 1964.

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Julia Hale's final years

From 1941, Julia's home was 'Buckanbe', a farm property at 32 Orion Road Vermont [established by 1927], which had originally been the home of Alfred and Mary Kirkpatrick, who had named it after their station 'Buckanbe' near Tilpa in outback NSW. Mary Kirkpatrick died in July 1941,⁵⁰ and the Hale family were already in residence there by February of that year.⁵¹ In 1945, Julia's father died aged 75. Her mother died in 1952 aged 79.

In 1953 Julia Hale fell ill with breast cancer. She put up a valiant eleven-year fight, treating herself with medicines from a Chinese herbalist, principal amongst which was a tea made with leaves from violets. Her kindness to the mill children was partially repaid when they made it their job to cultivate and pick violet leaves for her every time she visited the mill. At the end of 1956 she suffered a further blow with the loss of James Moore, who resigned to take his maturing family to Melbourne to take advantage of the greater opportunities for them there. Gus Brew took his place as mill manager. Almost in defiance of her mortality, Julia Hale had a large house constructed for her at the Nariel mill which, to the wonderment of the local children, had two bathrooms. But, by the time the house was finished, her condition had deteriorated and she spent at most two nights there. The cancer had spread to her lungs and bones, and she became confined to a wheelchair, unable to even manage the timber sales at which she was especially adept.⁵²

Julia Hale's final years were clouded by the long-running dispute with the Forests Commission and her long illness. Knowing that she was about to die, she made efforts to put a succession plan in place. On 28 August 1963, Myrree Saw Mills Pty Ltd was registered with a capital of £25,000 in 25,000 shares of £1. Its directors were Julia Hale, her brother Frederick Hale (now describing himself as 'gentleman', and secretary of the Company), Clarence Leonard 'Gus' Brew (Myrree mill manager of Corryong), and Edward James Rodgers (Myrree sales manager, also of Corryong). The registered office was Julia Hale's old address of suite 123, first floor St James Buildings, 127 William Street, Melbourne. The Company did not trade for long before Julia's death on 19 October 1964 at the still relatively young age of 57. At her request, her funeral was to be a private cremation at Springvale with as few formalities as possible.

Julia Hale had intended to transfer certain business to the Company but had not done so by the time she died. The Company was reorganised and, by 1965, the three directors included Leslie Thomas Strahan, a former forester who had graduated from the School of Forestry at Creswick in 1919 and later entered the sawmilling business, and ended his career as a timber merchant. He was a partner in the firm with a sawmilling area adjacent to that of the Myrrhee mill at West Tanjil, and his firm shared a director with Julia Hale's Tablelands Sawmills (Whitfield) Pty Ltd. The second was James Joseph Webster, sawmiller and timber merchant, and the third was Peter Balmford, solicitor. The new directors continued to run the Myrrhee enterprise until May of 1968 when the Nariel mill was sold. The Company was voluntarily wound up in July 1970.⁵³

Probate of the estate was granted to Leslie Strahan and Peter Balmford as executors.⁵⁴ Julia Hale's will, made on 2 May 1964, provided generously for her family, including cash bequests to her brother Frank, her sisters Edith and Beatrice, and to her friend Mrs Lyons. Several employees and family friends also received small amounts. To her sister Edith she left the main house at 'Buckanbe'. The remainder of the property was to be divided and sold to the best advantage of the estate. Edith Hale was to be paid a pension from the proceeds, and half the remaining estate was to be paid to Julia's niece, Margaret Jean Finlayson Bald.⁵⁵ Edith was to outlive her sister by only four years, dying at the age of 66 in 1968. Today, the site of the house forms 'Buckanbe Park', managed by the City of Whitehorse. Of the original facilities, only the farm dam remains. It is clear, however, that the property must have once had sweeping views as far as the Dandenong Ranges.⁵⁶

The end of the Myrrhee Saw Mill Company

Julia Hale's will allowed her executors to continue to operate the sawmilling business and made provisions for the disbursement of a proportion of any profits to senior employees Gus Brew and Edward Rodgers, as well as to any other employees her executors might feel deserving.⁵⁷ In February 1965, the executors of Julia Hale's estate enquired from the Forests Commission as to the probable life of the Nariel mill before they decided on an upgrade to the plant. The estimate given was eight years. Logging by this time had been completed as far south as Papes Creek Track and Dead Finish Track. On 1 July 1966, the rights held by the estate of Julia Hale in the Pinnibar Logging Unit were transferred to Myrrhee Saw Mills Pty Ltd. On 1 May 1968 Myrrhee Saw Mills Pty Ltd was sold to A. Dunstan Timber Sales Pty Ltd. By this time the houses situated at the Nariel mill were run-down and, although electricity had now reached the area and had been connected to the mill, it was difficult to induce labour to live there. The mill plant and seasoning kilns were also well past their prime. Dunstan's owned a modern sawmill at Eskdale in the Mitta Mitta Valley. The Eskdale mill had a capacity of eight million super feet annually but a log allocation of only half this amount. After a trial to prove the economics of log cartage from Nariel to Eskdale, permission was given to convert the Nariel allocation at the Eskdale mill in September 1969.⁵⁸ The Nariel mill was subsequently closed and dismantled, and only a boiler and the ruins of the concrete seasoning kilns remain today.

Julia Hale's bequest to the University of Melbourne

Julia Hale's will directed that, with her family and senior employees taken care of, the remaining half of her estate was to go to the University of Melbourne 'in connection with the work of the Forestry Department of that University'. She did not stipulate what the money was to be used for, and that the trustees of her estate 'should not be required to inquire into the application of the moneys to be received'.⁵⁹ The result of the bequest was the donation of \$1,000,000, which had increased by 50% by the end of 1994. This sum provides substantial income to be applied to the work of the Faculty of Agriculture, Forestry and Horticulture for research into forestry principles and practices.⁶⁰ As such, Julia Hale's influence lives on in modern forestry.

Notes

¹ Charlotte McDonald had a mill near Casterton in 1879. Elizabeth McQueen operated a sawmill near Omeo in 1880. Anne King and her sons ran sawmills at Bonnie Doon, Too-rour and Tallangalook until 1893 before moving to Hamilton. Mrs McLarin had a sawmill at McIntryre in 1880-1881 and a Sarah MacLernon [possibly the same woman] ran a sawmill at Orville during the same year, moving the mill to Wedderburn by 1904. Julia Costin had a mill at Kambruck in 1887. In 1888-1889, Sophie McKenzie operated a sawmill at Jindivick and, for 1890-1891, a mill at Tarago. Annie Don had a sawmill near Moe in 1893-94. Jane Armistead ran a sawmill with her sons near Geelong in 1893-1894. Ada and Rhoda Grigg operated a sawmill at Murrabit from 1892-1898. Mrs John Darrock and her sons had a sawmill at Whroo from 1899-1901. Mary Jane Dennis ran a sawmill near Sale in 1901. Mrs O'Connor ran a mill at Mangalore railway station (probably cutting firewood) in 1910. In the same year Mrs J Ryan had a mill at Launching Place. In 1917-1919 Mrs Walker ran a mill at Warburton. Elenor Sanderson took over her husband's mill in the Otways following the death of her husband in a tramway accident in 1907. *Sources: Post Office and Sands & McDougall directories for Victoria, and sawmill licences published in the Victorian Government Gazette.*

² Julia Hale birth certificate 2312, District of Norwood, SA, folio 56.

³ Julia Hale death certificate registered in Melbourne, 22801 of 1964. Her father was born at Great Berkhamstead, Hertfordshire, England, in 1870; her mother at Bathurst, NSW, in 1873. They married at Bathurst in 1898. Source: Australian birth, marriage and death records.

⁴ PROV, VPRS 00028/P4 unit 3325 file 619/445; *The Argus*, 11 May 1946.

⁵ *Sands Directories*, Sydney 1901.

⁶ Australian electoral rolls, Melbourne 1919.

⁷ Site inspection by the author, 23 September 2010.

⁸ Australian electoral rolls, Moonee Ponds 1924, 1931, 1936, 1937.

⁹ Australian electoral rolls, Maribyrnong 1931.

¹⁰ PROV, VPRS 11563/P1 unit 180 file 38/3715.

¹¹ PROV, VPRS 00932/P0 unit 1154 file 20017.

¹² PROV, VPRS 11563/P1 unit 179 file 38/2931.

¹³ PROV, VPRS 11563/P1 unit 108 file 34/0629; unit 241 file 45/280.

¹⁴ *The Mercury* (Hobart), 17 October 1945 page 5; 18 December 1945 page 9; 16 January 1946 page 4; 1 February 1946 page 8; 7 February 1946 page 8; *The Advocate* (Burnie) 16 January 1946 page 5; 22 January 1946 page 5; 24 January 1946 page 2; 25 January 1946 page 5; 26 January 1946 page 5; 1 February 1946 page 5.

¹⁵ *The Mercury*, (Hobart), 29 May 1946, page 1; 30 May 1946 page 2; 5 July 1946 page 9; *The Advocate* (Burnie) 28 May 1946 page 2; 4 October 1946 page 5.

¹⁶ PROV, VPRS 11563/P1 Unit 108 file 34/0629.

¹⁷ Local Aboriginal word for 'wind'.

¹⁸ PROV, VPRS 11563/P1 unit 179 file 37/3931; unit 180 file 38/3715.

¹⁹ PROV, VPRS 11563/P1 unit 412 file 58/0508; unit 202 file 40/0829.

²⁰ PROV, VPRS 11563/P1 unit 213 file 41/423; West Tanjil – Toorong map sheet, prepared by Forests Commission survey teams, copy in the possession of the author. See also PROV, VPRS 00425/P0 unit 844 file RC 24/6413 for tramway surveys carried out by the Railway Construction Branch of the Victorian Railways.

²¹ PROV, VPRS 11563/P1 unit 227 file 42/2009

²² PROV, VPRS 11563/P1 unit 327 file 52/676; unit 389 file 56/2030; VPRS 932/P1 unit 1076 file 29413.

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- ²³ PROV, VPRS 11563/P1 unit 212 file 41/0159. Donald Alexander Stronach (1893-1970) had operated a sawmill on Hollands Creek, not far from Myrree, from 1927-1930, and was probably already acquainted with Julia Hale. For details of the Hollands Creek operation see VPRS 11563/P1 unit 153 file 37/0441.
- ²⁴ PROV, VPRS 11563/P1 unit 223 file 42/0851.
- ²⁵ PROV, VPRS 11563/P1 unit 395 file 56/2533.
- ²⁶ PROV, VPRS 11563/P1 unit 193 file 39/2940.
- ²⁷ Interview with Norm Blackwood 12 May 2012. Norm Blackwood was the son-in-law of Myrree West Tanjil wartime mill manager Tommy Nott.
- ²⁸ PROV, VPRS 11563/P1 unit 412 file 58/0508.
- ²⁹ Interview with Alan Threader on 29 March 2012. Alan Threader was the forester stationed at Noojee overseeing the West Tanjil mills in 1945-1946.
- ³⁰ PROV, VPRS 11563/P1 unit 412 file 58/0508; NAA barcode 09562115 file M2936.
- ³¹ PROV, VPRS 11563/P1 unit 519 file 60/2306.
- ³² PROV, VPRS 11563/P1 unit 327 file 52/0717
- ³³ *The Argus*, 20 June 1951.
- ³⁴ PROV, VPRS 11563/P1 unit 327 file 52/0717.
- ³⁵ *The Argus*, 9 November 1943.
- ³⁶ Interview with Norman Endacott (former District Forester, Tallangatta) and Gus Brew (former Myrree bush-boss), 10 June 2011.
- ³⁷ PROV, VPRS 11563/P1 unit 903 file 67/0717; NAA barcode 0955084 file M5211.
- ³⁸ PROV, VPRS 00267/P5 unit 277 file 1962/3649; SLV images a29123 and a29124; site inspection by the author on 23 September 1997.
- ³⁹ *GMH People* (GMH in-house magazine), Volume 5, Number 4, February 1953.
- ⁴⁰ Interviews with Betty Arrowsmith (daughter of James Moore) 23 June 2011; Gus Brew, Ruth Ure (sister of Gus Brew), George Ure (brother-in-law of Gus Brew), Lois Rothe (daughter of Gus Brew) and Allison Butterworth (daughter of Gus Brew) 25 June 2011.
- ⁴¹ Interview with Norman Endacott (former District Forester, Tallangatta) and Gus Brew (former Myrree bush boss), 10 June 2011.
- ⁴² Interviews with Betty Arrowsmith (daughter of James Moore) 23 June 2011; Gus Brew, Ruth Ure (sister of Gus Brew), George Ure (brother-in-law of Gus Brew), Lois Rothe (daughter of Gus Brew) and Allison Butterworth (daughter of Gus Brew) 25 June 2011.
- ⁴³ PROV, VPRS 11563/P1 unit 903 file 67/1370
- ⁴⁴ *Wodonga and Towong Sentinel* Friday 11 November 1949 page 1; *The Argus*, Saturday 4 December 1954, page 5; Personal communication from former FCV lawyer Thomas Chettle on 15 January 2012.
- ⁴⁵ Proceedings of the Legislative Assembly, 30 October 1956, pages 5376 and 5377. The original submission is PROV, VPRS 11195/P1/12: *Affidavit by Miss Julia Hale re Forests Commission 1956*. This is a Legislative Council file and access is currently restricted.
- ⁴⁶ Interview with Norman Endacott (former district Forester, Tallangatta) and Gus Brew (former Myrree bush boss), 10 June 2011.
- ⁴⁷ PROV, VPRS 11563/P1 unit 903 file 67/1370.
- ⁴⁸ Interview with Gus Brew, 10 June 2011.
- ⁴⁹ Personal communication from Thomas Chettle on 15 January 2012, a former FCV lawyer who was involved in the case on the Forests Commission's side.
- ⁵⁰ PROV, VPRS 00932/P0 unit 1154 file 20017; *The Argus*, 28 October 1927, 10 July 1939; 8 July 1941.
- ⁵¹ Australian electoral rolls, Deakin 1943; *The Argus*, 11 May 1946.

⁵² Interviews with Betty Arrowsmith (daughter of James Moore) 23 June 2011; Gus Brew, Ruth Ure (sister of Gus Brew), George Ure (brother-in-law of Gus Brew), Lois Rothe (daughter of Gus Brew) and Allison Butterworth (daughter of Gus Brew) 25 June 2011.

⁵³ PROV, VPRS 00932/P1 unit 3448 file 58004.

⁵⁴ PROV, VPRS 00028/P4 unit 3325 file 619/455. See also *University of Melbourne Archives*, papers of Webster, J. J. Pty Ltd, builders and sawmillers, containing the estate documents of Julia Hale. Accession number 92/85.

⁵⁵ PROV, VPRS 07591/P3 unit 563 file 619/445.

⁵⁶ Personal inspection by the author, 2 September 2010.

⁵⁷ PROV, VPRS 07591/P3 unit 563 file 619/445. Oral testimony indicates that the part of the will conferring benefits on Gus Brew and other mill employees was successfully contested by Fred Hale.

⁵⁸ PROV, VPRS 11563/P1 unit 903 file 67/1370

⁵⁹ PROV, VPRS 07591/P3 unit 563 file 619/445.

⁶⁰ <http://unimelb.edu.au/unisec/utr/pdf/utr7170.pdf>, accessed 8 September 2010.