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# AUSTRALIAN Forest History SOCIETY

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Newsletter no.15

May 1997

*'... to advance historical understanding of human interactions with Australian forest and woodland environments.'*

## FOREST REFLECTIONS

With our third national conference successfully concluded, some of its papers already published and editing of the full proceedings well advanced, it is time for reflection, perhaps encouraged by the glorious autumn colours of Canberra's trees and the new vintage of the local wineries.

Sometimes it is the simplest things, well put, that linger in the mind. Oliver Rackham made the point in his conference paper that the European forest landscape was shaped by long cultural traditions, that the woods had been gradually domesticated over the centuries and that they were part of the agricultural landscape. By contrast, the Australian landscape was violently and suddenly transformed. Will we see forests and woodlands emerge as harmonious, ecologically stable parts of our landscapes? Are they doing so already? Forest historians have something to contribute here as the increasing number of detailed regional studies show.

Every few years Australian and New Zealand foresters meet. An ANZIF conference just concluded focused on the changes in both countries and what might be needed for the future. The old imperial model of forestry with its state forest departments and commissions has changed beyond recognition. Now, New Zealand's public native forests are managed by a conservation service and its large state plantations have been sold. In Australia, more of the native forests are in national parks, the responsibilities of the renamed state forest services have been distributed or amalgamated with other agencies, and the state plantations are corporatised. All this stimulates intriguing questions for forest historians. What was the ethos of these forest agencies? How did it change as they were 'professionalised'? How did Australian forestry adapt its British estate and classical/imperial forestry traditions to new circumstances?

The Landcare and Catchment Management movements are encouraging farmers to plant trees and the Government has recently announced that it wants to treble the area of Australia's plantations by the year 2020, much of it on private land. The long history of encouragement and extension schemes, which have existed for at least a century, seem little known but offer an important research area for forest historians.

The trouble with reflecting is that it stimulates new ideas and things to do. But that is what we are about, isn't it?

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### ***The Coming of Age: Forest Age and Heritage Values***

*Report of the Concepts of Forest  
Age Seminar held at Jervis Bay  
as part of the Australia's Ever-  
changing Forests III  
Conference, 24-28 November  
1996.*

Edited by John Dargavel  
Canberra: Environment Australia  
(1997 Technical Series No1)  
pp.102. ISBN 0 642 270155

This publication was commissioned by the Australian Heritage Commission from The Australian National University in the context of the Comprehensive Regional Assessment and Regional Forest Agreement processes currently underway in forested regions across Australia. It was launched before an audience of Australian and New Zealand foresters in the Great Hall of Parliament House by Senator Robert Hill, Minister for the Environment.

It contains seven of the papers delivered at the AFHS Conference with the addition of introductory and concluding chapters. In distributing the report, the Director of the Heritage Standards Section of Environment Australia, Marina Walkington, wrote that:

The papers emphasise that forests are both 'cultural' and 'natural' places and that a broad, comprehensive approach to their assessment is required. They also emphasise that not only are forests and the ways in which they are valued diverse, but that they are constantly changing and evolving according to time and place. It is clear that to protect the many different values of the forests, our understanding of them must be broad and open.

Copies have been sent to all those who registered at the Conference. If you did not attend the conference, but would like to receive a copy of this publication a limited number are available free of charge. These may be obtained by writing to:

Attention: Dai Harrison, Heritage  
Standards Section, Environment Forest  
Task Force, Environment Australia  
GPO Box 787, Canberra, ACT 2601



From left: Katie Saxby, John Dargavel and  
Phillipa Watt at the *Coming of Age* launch.

### **Conference Proceedings**

Editing the Proceedings of our November Conference is well underway and all late papers have been received. John Dargavel and Sue Feary are editing the text and Michael Tracey has kindly offered to handle all the illustrations and prepare the final copy ready to go to the printer. John and Sue spent a most enjoyable evening seeing how Michael can do this on his awe-inspiring image processing computer system.

Members can note that all the Conference papers, including those in the *Coming of Age* publication will be included in the Proceedings.

### **Tramping along the corduroy track (others surf the superhighway)**

*Virtual Library: Forestry*

[www.metla.fi/info/vlib/Forestry.html](http://www.metla.fi/info/vlib/Forestry.html)

This is the most comprehensive international forestry site. It provides both a wide range of material and links to numerous other forestry sites. It covers working groups and networks; journals, newsletters and conference proceedings; mailing lists and Usenet groups; bibliographies; research papers and publications; legislation and international agreements; forest policy; software; databases; entomology; libraries, conferences and meetings.

#### *Environmental history discussion groups*

The National Museum of Australia has had to pull back from its idea of starting an email discussion group on Australian environmental history. However, a new group has been started by Richard Grove, which, although international in coverage, could suit Australian forest historians very well. It is based at The Australian National University in Canberra and is only just getting going. It is an unmoderated list and has had a few teething problems which are being sorted out. To subscribe to it, send an email message to:

majordomo@coombs.anu.edu.au  
with the one-line command in the body of the message:

subscribe envirohistory-l <your email address>

An older moderated list (mentioned in an earlier Newsletter) is ASEH-H which carries mainly North American material.

#### *Old-growth discussion list*

An old-growth discussion list has been started to explore the concept of 'old-growth' forests together with 'natural forests', 'primary forests', 'virgin forests' and other related terms. It operated from January and will close on 27 June, 1997. The primary object is to provide a forum for people around the world to make others aware of the concept of 'old-growth forests' as it exists in different parts of the world. To subscribe, send an email message to:

listproc@NRCan.gov.gc.ca  
with the following command in the body of the message:

subscribe oldgrowth-list <first name last name>

### **Welcome to new members**

*Peter Davis* is studying the history and archaeology of forest-based sawmilling settlements in Victoria's Otway Ranges, from c.1890-1939 for a PhD in archaeology at La Trobe University. His research explores the nature of settlement patterns, and their relationship to environment and technology, especially at the larger, more established mill sites. Related issues include the role and impact of women and children, site

formation processes, and public perceptions of Victoria's forest estate. He would welcome comments and suggestions and can be contacted at the Department of Archeology, La Trobe University, Bundoora, Vic. 3083, tel: (03) 9481 1414, email: arcpwd@lure.latrobe.edu.au

*Colin Harvey* is based in Victoria and is interested in the history of the forest-based industries and their transport systems.

*Mathew Higgins* is a freelance historian who has undertaken several heritage studies of forested areas in the Canberra region. His work on the arboreta was mentioned in an earlier newsletter. In 1993 he studied brumby running in the Namadgi mountains, and located a number of trapyards in the Brindabellas and other ranges of Canberra's mountain hinterland. He was interested to discover that alpine ash stands were preferred as yard sites where possible on account of the straighter timber which made building a yard that much easier. This year Mathew has completed a study of the original survey of the ACT-NSW border to locate the original border markers. At many of the 272 markers, he found that the reference trees blazed by the early surveyors were still intact sometimes containing very fine examples of the surveyor's skill with chisel and mallet. His study, *Surveyors at the snowline*, gained this year's award from the ACT Heritage Council.

*Marie Keatley* is doing her PhD at Melbourne University and is interested in the use of 'historical' data as it relates to forest history. A particular interest is in how the seasonal flowering of the eucalypts has varied from year to year.

*Elizabeth Norris* has just completed a Masters degree on the history of the Pillaga forests. She is particularly interested in pre-history and early settlement.

*Ron O'Reilly* is a welcome addition to our list of New Zealand members. He is at the School of Forestry in the University of Canterbury at Christchurch.

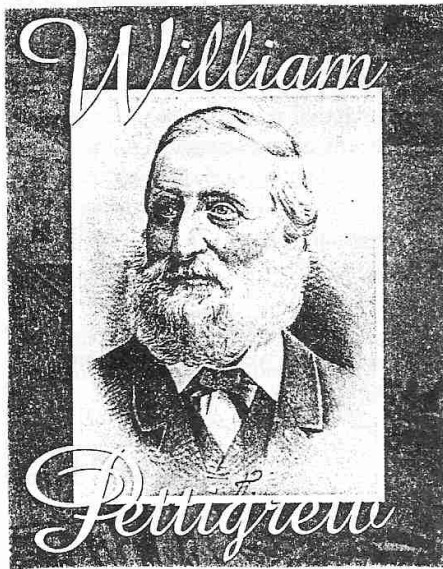
*Caroline Polak Scowcroft* is a writer/editor with the Bureau of Resource Sciences in Canberra and wants to be more involved in

forestry and forest history. She has kindly volunteered to help with the production of this newsletter.

*Sharon Veale* works in the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service and is interested in Aboriginal, cultural and historic values of forests as part of the CRA process.

### Work in Progress

The History Department at the University of Queensland is a lively place for environmental and forest history. *Ross Johnston* will be teaching a new second-year course on environmental history in the second semester 1997. He is also working on a study of the Border Ranges which will have a major focus on the forests.



Source: *Between the Leaves*

William Pettigrew built the first steam-powered sawmill in Brisbane in 1853 and created a substantial timber business which included several ships and two other mills, at Maroochydhore and near Maryborough, with wooden tramlines and steam locomotives.

*Elaine Brown* is writing a biography of William Pettigrew, Brisbane's first sawmiller for her PhD. A short article on Pettigrew by Jude Atchison was published in the summer 1997 issue of *Between the Leaves* which is published by Queensland's Department of Natural Resources and Department of Primary Industry, Forestry.

*Keith Prokop* is writing a PhD dissertation on the history of Fraser Island and *Rosmary Ahern* is writing a Masters thesis about Morton Island.

### The People's Forest - to music

Gregg Borschmann is adding a new dimension to his project on the history of *The People's Forest*. Gregg has been collecting oral histories of people involved in the forests and has a volume nearly ready for publication. Now he is planning a folk-life project to be presented as part of the Easter 1998 National Folk Festival in Canberra which will have as its core theme a celebration of Australia's forests. It will have an exhibition, musical performances and the release of a CD of folk music related to forests.

The project is being developed in collaboration with the National Library of Australia, the National Museum of Australia, and the National Film and Sound Archive. We wish Gregg every success and look forward to reporting more details of the project as it develops.

### Parks Conference - April 1998

As next year is the Centenary of the creation of Wilsons Promontory and Mt Buffalo National Parks in Victoria, Elery Hamilton-Smith and a group of people interested in the history of parks, both rural and urban, are organising a symposium on all aspects of park history in Australia. As so many of our national parks are forested, this promises to be an exciting meeting for forest historians. A copy of the first circular and call for papers is enclosed.

Members wishing to read up on Wilsons Promontory are reminded of the paper by Jane Lennon at our first conference: 'Timeless wilderness? The use of historical source material in understanding environmental change in Gippsland, Victoria'. in K.J. Frawley and N. Semple (eds) 1989. *Australia's Ever Changing Forests: Proceedings of the First National Conference on Australian Forest History*. Campbell, ACT: Department of Geography and Oceanography, Australian Defence Force Academy.

## Great Trees of Australia

What makes you say 'that is a great tree'? Which do you think are Australia's one hundred 'greatest' trees? Do you know one? John Banks and John Dargavel would love to hear from you as they are investigating the feasibility of producing an attractive and scholarly book about them.

There are various values which make trees 'great'. They might be of remarkable size or age, or of botanical interest, or have indigenous or historical associations like the Dig Tree or the Investigator Tree. Then there are commemorative trees planted by notable people or to mark their passing; who has not been affected by the avenues of trees planted for fallen servicemen and women?

A popular, attractive, yet scholarly volume of about A4 size with an almost 'coffee table' presentation is envisaged with a carefully researched text and with a roughly equal amount of photographs and other illustrations. A double page spread for each tree and a species arrangement might work well. Each tree should have a statement about the nature of its value, its history, its location and information on how to visit it, with a map if need be. The focus is to be on individual trees but sometimes small groups might be included, the 'Four Aces' in the karri forest springs to mind. The book will be restricted to native trees. In heroic mode, John B envisages that exotics might be treated in a subsequent volume if the first is successful.

There are numerous sources relating to large trees and logs. Frank Moulds and Tim Bonyhady have written on the searches for the tallest *Eucalyptus regnans*, for example. There are also records of great trees of the past, the huge logs they provided and the stumps they left as their obituaries. Some of the forest services have records of large and notable trees. Hillary Smith has located some District Office files on these in Queensland, there is a central file there too and there are believed to be files for New South Wales also.

Some notable trees have already been recognised officially on the various heritage



A group of mature alpine ash at Bago State Forest, NSW, managed for sustained yield using group selection logging techniques.

Source: Hans Drielsma

registers, and many more have been the reason why certain patches of accessible forest were chosen as 'beauty spots' and 'picnic spots'. It promises to be a very pleasant topic to research.

The ability to obtain photographs of high quality will be critical to determining whether the publication is feasible. John D looked at the fine collection of black and white photos built up by Departmental photographers in Queensland from the 1930s to the 1950s. Colour photographs would also be needed for a contemporary publication.

The two Johns would love to hear from anybody with ideas about which trees should be included, if they have information or photographs of particular trees, or would like to be involved if the project proves feasible and proceeds. John B is making up the list of trees to be considered for inclusion. Contacts at The Australian National University, Canberra ACT 0200:

*John Banks*, Department of Forestry,

Tel: (06)249 3632

email: [John.Banks@anu.edu.au](mailto:John.Banks@anu.edu.au)

*John Dargavel*, Urban Research

Program, Research School of Social Sciences

Tel: (06)249 2118/ (06)258 9102(h)

email: [John.Dargavel@anu.edu.au](mailto:John.Dargavel@anu.edu.au)



The Premier of Queensland, Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen, crowning Miss Queensland Timber  
Photo: E.J. Woodley, Rochester, courtesy Charles Achilles, Hyne & Son Pty Ltd

### Lord Robinson (1883-1952)

*Michael R.W. Williams*, a British forester who has retired to Queensland, has written a biographical note on Roy Lister Robinson who was born in Macclesfield in South Australia in 1883. Robinson went to Oxford as a Rhodes scholar and took his Forestry Diploma in 1909. He stayed in Britain and eventually became Chairman of the Forestry Commission there. Michael Williams can be contacted at 61 Helicia St, Algera, Qld 4115.

### Light Railways publications

Mention was made of the Light Railways Research Society of Australia in our last Newsletter. The Society publishes high-quality books written its members. It markets books, maps of tramways in forest regions and back numbers of its journal, *Light Railways*, many of which are special issues related to timber tramways in various areas. A list of their publications is enclosed.

## Publications

F.R. Moulds and M.J. Burns 1997. *From little seeds: a history of the Macedon State Nursery, 1872-1995*. Melbourne: Forests Service, Department of Natural Resources and Environment. 64pp. \$10

Nurseries are far more important in the history of Australian forestry than they are often given credit for and the particular influence of Scottish 'arboriculturalists' cries out for detailed research. Libby Robin's history of the Natural Conservation League of Victoria and this publication are an important start to redressing the balance. We can look forward to John Gray's study of Weston's work in Canberra and hope that nurseries will attract more attention in other areas also.

Frank Moulds and Margaret Burns write with knowledge and affection, tracing the nursery from its establishment in 1872 through the 'Firth era' from 1885 to 1922 when the Scot, Joseph Firth, was the Superintendent. The nursery was devastated by the 1983 fires but was re-established and operated successfully until it finally closed in 1995, another victim of managerialist fashion.

Any good study leaves one with questions for another. How did all the great variety of the trees that were raised with such care at Macedon grow? It is not an irrelevant question in this day of resurgent interest in planting trees in the rural landscape.

*John Dargavel*

## Geography Conference

A number of papers of interest to forest historians were given at the Institute of Australian Geographers Annual Conference in Hobart earlier this year:

- Chris Cocklin and Melanie Wall. Contested rural futures and the East Coast Forestry Project.
- Julie Delaney and Andrew Skidmore. When you can't see the forest for the trees: the use of GIS in modelling forest type distribution.
- Heidi Ellemor. Contesting interpretations and representations of the Barmah-Millewa Forest: reflections on 'environmental management'.
- Stephen J. Gale, R.J. Haworth and P.C. Pisanu. Human impact on the natural environment in early colonial Australia: the New England Tablelands of north-east New South Wales.

- Ian Household, Nathan Duhug, Chris Staples and Grant Dixon. Georegionalisation - a conceptual tool and spatial tool for the identification of places of geoconservation significance.
- Louise Mendel. Nature preservation: for what purpose.
- David Paul. Bandicoots, barriers and biogeography: habitat mapping using GIS.
- Lesley Potter. Collecting gutta percha: the political ecology of a wild forest product.
- Jim Russell and Simon Cubit. Reclaiming the cultural environment: communities re-define the concept of heritage.
- Neil Saintilan. Landward incursion of mangroves on Mangrove Creek, a tributary of the Hawkesbury River.
- Dale Sanders. The timber industry in the Leeuwin-Naturaliste region 1829-1902.
- John Selwood and Mark Brayshaw. The Devon and Cornwall Group Settlements of Western Australia.
- Chris Sharples. Landform conservation progress in Tasmanian forestry management.
- Suzanne Woolhouse. A historical perspective on government assisted agricultural land release programs and current land usage in the Great Southern Region of Western Australia: 1895-1995.

*Ruth Lane and Dale Sanders*

## Pete Steen retires from the Forest History Society - USA

Harold K. (Pete) Steen, who has directed the work of the Forest History Society as its President since 1978, is to retire on 7 June this year. Under his leadership, the FHS has become a very soundly established, professionally-staffed organisation with a range of research, publication, service, library and archival programmes. It is affiliated with Duke University and co-publishes the quarterly journal *Environmental History* (not to be confused with the British-based *Environment and History*).

Pete Steen is well known for his history of the US Forest Service and other writings and to Australians who have been able to visit the FHS headquarters in Durham. Pete was a very active co-leader of the IUFRO Forest History Group and convened a major international symposium on the history of sustained yield in 1984. He attended our first national conference and lent his support, encouragement and advice when we decided to form the AFHS. We wish Pete and Gail an interesting, long and very happy retirement.

### *Australia's Ever-changing Forests IV*

Gympie and Fraser Island, Queensland, April 1999

Planning has started for our fourth national conference on Australia's forest history which will be held in the Forestry Training Centre in Gympie with a two-day excursion to Fraser Island. The Centre has good conference facilities, affordable accommodation and the Wood Works Museum. Fraser Island has a long indigenous history, a century of logging and forestry history, and parks history. A tentative plan is to travel to Gympie on a Sunday - there are trains and buses ex Brisbane - have papers on the Monday and Tuesday, spend Wednesday and Thursday on Fraser Island and allow Friday for return to Brisbane. Contact: Margaret Kowald, 9 Bowaga St, Indooroopilly, Qld 4068 or John Dargavel, 20 Laidley Place, Florey, ACT 2615.

### **Australian Conferences**

#### *The River*

#### *AHA Regional Conference*

Newcastle, NSW, 28-30 November 1997  
1997 is the Bicentenary of the naming of the Hunter River. Topics include the environment, public and applied history. Contact: Dr Nancy Cushing, Dept. History, Univ. Newcastle, Callaghan NSW 2308

#### *Celebrating Parks:*

#### *a symposium on parks history*

Mt Buffalo Chalet, Vic. 17-19 April 1998  
1998 is the Centenary of founding Wilsons Promontory and Mt. Buffalo National Parks. Papers are called for on all aspects of parks history including city parks. Contact: Elerly Hamilton-Smith, PO Box 36, Carlton South, Vic. 3053. Tel: 03 9489 7785 Fax: 03 9841 2439 email: elery@melb.alexia.net.au

#### *The People's Forest*

#### *at the National Folk Festival*

Canberra, Easter 1998

An exhibition, concerts and release of music CD. Contact: Gregg Borschmann, PO Box 227, Blackheath, NSW 2785

### **International Conferences**

#### *International, multicultural, interdisciplinary: public history policy and practice*

Austin, Texas - 15-19 April 1998

Contact: Carl Phagan and Kris Mitchell, Batelle Pantex, P.O. Box 30020, Amarillo, Texas 79120-0020 USA  
email: kcmitch@pantex.com

#### *History and Forest Resources*

Florence, 18-23 May 1998

IUFRO Forest History Group and Accademia Italiana di Scienze Forestali have called for papers on forest history and socio-economic development with attention to scale of investigation. Contact: Dr Mauro Agnoletti, Istituto di Assetamento e Tecnologia Forestale, Università di Firenze, Via San Bonaventura 13, 50145 Firenze, Italy.  
email: agnoletti@cesitl.unifi.it

### **SUBSCRIPTION FOR 1997**

The Australian Forest History Society is open to all who support its objective which is '*... to advance historical understanding of human interactions with Australian forest and woodland environments.*' New members will be welcomed and existing members are asked to make the Society known to all who might be interested. Subscriptions are for *calendar* years.

Name: .....

Organisation (if any): .....

Address: .....

.....(State) .....(Postcode) .....

Tel: ..... Fax: ..... email: .....

Field of interest in forest history: .....

Please mail cheque or money order (made payable to the 'Australian Forest History Society') to: 20 Laidley Place, Florey, ACT 2615 with \$15 cheque or postal order (Overseas \$A20).





