

Opening address, Dr. Geo. Mason.

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New Zealand Arboricultural Conference  
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Opening Remarks  
George Mason  
New Plymouth

Conference Chairman Bryan Gould, members of the New Zealand Arboricultural Association and delegates. A warm welcome to Taranaki and to New Plymouth, my home city for nearly fifty years.

It is a pleasure to be invited to open your Conference, an honour I must say is normally reserved for local dignitaries such as the District Mayor.

Before the formal opening it seems appropriate for me to comment on some historical aspects of arboriculture in this unique province of Taranaki. Which ever way you traveled to New Plymouth all of you could have viewed a landscape dominated by a plant cover of high production grass pasture. This extends over a dissected volcanic ring plain from the boundary of Egmont National Park to the Taranaki coast.

A century and a half ago, a temperate mixed podocarp/broadleaf forest covered these slopes. The emergent podocarps such as rimu, miro, totara, kahikatea, as in much of New Zealand, defined the ancient forest landscape. These magnificent trees were sold off cheap, or burnt to get at the land underneath. Only the best of the timbers were used in our older suburban and farm houses, fences and farm sheds. This/discriminate forest destruction led/the desire of some pioneers to protect and to preserve the inland forest slopes.

In 1881, under the Land Act, all of Mount Egmont from the summit to the six mile radius line was permanently reserved. This reserve designated "for the growth and preservation of timber" became the principal focus of the Taranaki Scenery Preservation Society, formed in New Plymouth in 1891. These far sighted citizens draughted the Egmont National Park Bill which was gazetted in 1900 to establish New Zealand's second National Park. An article in "The New Zealand Times" in commenting on the Bill stated "There is no organisation in the Colony more energetic in doing everything in its power to preserve portions of native bush from wanton destruction than the Taranaki Scenery Preservation Society". By contrast to this view, the then pastoral farmer often regarded trees when planted as a crop on his farm to be a waste of useful land.

Soon however Taranaki Arboriculture found its first specialist with the appointment in 1908 of W W Smith as custodian of Pukekura Park. Tree planting was his passion. Smith trained with the great tree planter JB Acland in Canterbury. In 1910 WW Smith planted the first Kauri in Pukekura Park. He proved that Kauri would flourish far from its southern natural limit at Kawhia. Apart from his other interest in podocarp plantings, Smith, as a far sighted field naturalist, wrote a letter to the Taranaki Herald. He referred to the future of *Pinus radiata* plantings as follows: "When their proper culture is undertaken and the trees grown to perfect maturity, the use of these fine light timbers will unquestionably prove to be valuable for many purposes for which they are not used at present". How prophetic for New Zealand today!

His successor at Pukekura park was Thomas Horton who in 1935 planted Kauri as a grove in Brooklands Park. This is now a magnificent stand to be treasured for centuries. Previously in 1925, a year after his appointment, he planted an avenue of rimu, totara and kauri in Pukekura Park to establish these as a multiple stand of mixed native trees, now named the Horton Walk.

Thomas Horton wrote the planting instructions for the school Arbour Day planting of Kauri in 1936. The Taranaki Education Board instructed every school to receive ~~a~~/a kauri tree (donated by VC Davies of Duncan */ (and plant)* and Davies Ltd). "The school log book was to record this event".

Pukekura Park and Brooklands contain many specimen trees of national importance because of their size and maturity. These include a giant Torrey Pine, two very large Norfolk Island pines, a giant Ginkgo biloba and a North American Hickory, (Caya ovata). These share the Parks with some of New Zealand's largest remnant specimens of native trees. Amongst regenerating tawa, titoki, karaka in the Southern end of Brooklands is a Puriri, estimated to be 2000 years old.

Another notable Taranaki Arboriculturists, but perhaps less well known, was Fred Cowling. In the period of 1940-44 he furthered the planting of Kauri as ~~two~~/two hectare block */a* set out on his private pasture land. His aim was to establish a small Kauri forest reserve, besides which he donated access land to Barrett's Lagoon. This plantation is now known as Cowling Reserve, a gem in the New Plymouth District Scheme.

Cowling also experimented with plantings of Coastal Redwoods, Eucalyptus species amongst pines and more Kauri in a native bush area in Barrett Domain.

This leads me on to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

One of my last visits with my late friend John McIntyre, a North Island Farm Forester of the year, was to his recent plantings of various selections from California of coastal redwood at Waitui, North Taranaki. So the endeavours of these early Taranaki conservationists and far sighted arboriculturists continues today.

It is with that same sense of practical scientific inquiry that I discern is part of the theme of this conference.

I warmly welcome you to New Plymouth and wish you memorable and informative conference sessions and field visits.

Thank you for your conference participation. I now have much pleasure in formally declaring your Arboricultural Conference open.