

# OUR INSTITUTE

By OWEN JONES

## Presidential Address to the Annual General Meeting of the N.Z. Institute of Foresters, 24th June, 1948.

Our New Zealand Institute of Foresters has this year attained its majority, the present being its 21st Annual Meeting; it thus seems appropriate to give some account of its origin and activities up to date, and if possible to indicate some of the lines along which it may develop and increase its usefulness.

On the 28th and 29th of April, 1927, a meeting was held in Wellington "to discuss preliminary matters regarding the formation of a Society of Professional Foresters in New Zealand." The meeting was under the Chairmanship of the late Mr. MacIntosh Ellis, then Director of Forestry, and with one exception (Mr. Foweraker, Lecturer in Charge, School of Forestry, Canterbury University College), all the eighteen persons present were officers of the State Forest Service.

At this meeting it was decided that "the time is ripe for the formation of a New Zealand Society of Foresters; that the Society adopt as its Object the Object of the Society of American Foresters, amended where necessary to apply to New Zealand." The Object suitably amended reads: "The Object of this Society shall be to further the development of technical forestry and the interests of the profession of forestry in the Dominion of New Zealand by encouraging achievement in the science of forestry, by creating opportunity for an interchange of views upon forestry and allied subjects, and by fostering a spirit of comradeship among foresters." For some reason all words after "Dominion of New Zealand" were subsequently omitted; which seems a pity, as encouraging achievement, creating opportunity for an interchange of views, and fostering a spirit of comradeship are all most desirable Objects for an Institute such as this.

The meeting also provided for 17 inaugural members:—

Graduate foresters practising their profession	8
Non-graduate foresters practising their profession	7
Directors of University Forest Schools	2

It is interesting to note that of these 17 inaugural members one has since died, 10 are still members of the Institute, and 4 are present here to-day.

At this meeting in Wellington our Institute was in effect born. It was not, however, actually the start of proceedings to form an Institute, as reference is made to an Auckland Committee, under the Chairmanship of Professor Corbin, which had "done good work" before the Wellington meeting; and the journal *Te Kura Ngahere*,

December, 1927, speaks of the proposal to form a society or institute amongst forest technicians as being "now four years old." The Editorial of that issue is worth quoting:—

"The credit for first initiating the movement toward the formation of such an institute belongs to the three Edinburgh graduates who were the first technical foresters to return to New Zealand after the appointment of the Director and the Chief Inspector of the State Forest Service. . . . But in those days the trained foresters were few in number, and being all in fairly close contact with each other, did not greatly feel the need for closer bonds, so that while all approved the idea, little was done, and the matter remained in abeyance. The ensuing three years, however, saw a great broadening of forestry work in the Dominion, with the expansion of Government and private activity in afforestation. The next move toward some bond of union between men engaged in forestry executive positions came not so much from the trained forest technicians as from those, who, while not possessed of a University degree in forestry, had by reason of long practical experience in the building up of the exotic plantations of New Zealand during the past twenty years, proved their right to be heard in regard to forestry matters. With this impetus the movement sprang suddenly to life again, and was generally endorsed and supported by all persons engaged in forestry work in this country."

The Editorial (written by Mr. Hutchinson) continues with a deal of matter which can well be taken to heart. Speaking of the question of membership it refers to fears of conflict between "trained technicians, jealously guarding their scientific status within the charmed circle of University degrees; and the practical men, who, working alone and unaided, had by dint of constant experiment, trial, error and retrial, persisted indomitably in actually doing the forestry work of this country during the past twenty-five years. It was immediately made obvious, however, that such fears were groundless. The technician on one hand admitted at once that while the basis of all forestry as an applied science lies upon the study and application of natural and physical law, the practical man has through his intimate contact with his work over a long time developed a vast store of valuable knowledge of technique and application, and is thoroughly entitled to be listened to with respect; while on the other hand the practical man ungrudgingly stated that while the basis of all accomplishment in forestry was in getting things done, yet the scientific method of approach to forestry problems is the basis of all increased understanding of the laws governing forest growth, and the technician also is thoroughly entitled to be listened to with respect.

“This recognition of unanimity of purpose is the greatest accomplishment made so far. It does not mean that bars of entrance are to be let down—far from it—a high standard of accomplishment and a sincere and earnest attitude towards one’s profession are the essential requirements for admission. It does mean however that the right of entry shall be purely by merit and individual accomplishment, and ensures that if a man who may be denied the opportunity of securing a scientific training in the usual way at a University, has still trained, schooled, and disciplined himself to approach his work in the attitude of diligent and unceasing search for and application of the laws of nature, he shall be given every opportunity to make his voice heard, to give to others the knowledge he has built up within himself, and to receive from others those things which they in turn have devised, tested and proved.”

The following issue of *Te Kura Ngahere*, October, 1928, states that the movement to set up an Institute of Foresters in New Zealand had definitely crystallised.

“At a meeting of charter members held in Rotorua last March, a constitution was definitely adopted, and officers elected. Three grades of membership, full, associate, and student, were defined, and efforts are now being made to secure the support of all persons eligible for membership throughout New Zealand.

The first officers were: President, Mr. L. M. Ellis; Vice-president, Prof. H. H. Corbin; Secretary, Mr. F. W. Foster; Councillors, Messrs. A. Hanson, W. T. Morrison, C. M. Smith, A. D. McGavock.”

Some time during 1929 formal incorporation under the Incorporated Societies Act was secured, and as *Te Kura Ngahere* in December of that year puts it: “the formative stage of the New Zealand Institute of Foresters has culminated in successful fruition, and from now on it may be expected that this body will make that full contribution to the advancement of the profession which was the ultimate goal inspiring those who have persevered, in the face of considerable discouragement, in the past five years.”

That roughly is how our Institute came into being. As you can readily imagine many details have necessarily been omitted, and it is suggested that if these are not already on record, they should be so placed as early as possible. With any institution such as this, with no permanent office and no permanent office staff, it is inevitably the case that in future years its origins become obscure, and it is desirable that whilst they can still be obtained, records of the early days should be collected. If this is done in good time a great deal of hard work and worry will be saved later, and an adequate record will be available of an institution, such as this, which in the years to come, will assume ever greater importance.

A number of subsequent developments deserve mention. At the general meeting in 1929 two important amendments were adopted, one dealing with provision for local sections, and the other for the publication of professional papers and transactions ; as it was rightly felt that only by the dissemination of knowledge in common problems and the imparting of mutual enthusiasm and interest the Institute could be of real value to the profession. In the words of one of the members, local sections should become the very life blood of the Institute ; a statement whose truth is well on the way to being justified here in Rotorua. It was also envisaged that ultimately the Institute would publish an organ of its own, and it was hoped that the fact that publication could be secured under the aegis of the Institute and that the papers would reach all those interested would lead to a great stimulation in the flow of papers from the pens of New Zealand's foresters. To what extent that hope has been realised we may leave our long-suffering Editors to judge.

At the annual meeting in 1930 it was resolved that a seal be prepared for the Institute, the design to be embodied from native flora ; and subsequently a design embodying a fruiting spray of rimu, with a mountain background, submitted by Miss Sutherland, was adopted. This no doubt will be familiar to most of you. If it is not, I suggest you look at it, as it still appears amongst other places, upon the cover of your Journal.

In 1931, by arrangement with the Canterbury College School of Forestry, *Te Kura Ngahere*, the forestry journal published annually by the School, became the organ of publication of the Institute. At the end of 1934 the School was closed, due to financial stringency, and from 1935 onwards the Journal has been published by the Institute as *The New Zealand Journal of Forestry*. Thanks to the unflagging devotion of its successive Editors the Journal has sustained a uniformly high standard, and is now widely known and favourably regarded.

In 1946 a Public Relations Officer was appointed, to take all such steps as are possible to bring the work of the professional forester and the principles of sound forest practice before the general public of New Zealand.

Very briefly and inadequately such was the inauguration of our Institute. It was formed by the efforts of a small body of enthusiasts, and has been kept alive ever since largely by the efforts of a small body of enthusiasts. Too much credit can hardly be given them, for without their untiring efforts we would have no Institute to-day. In saying this I make no personal claim, for like many other members I did little or nothing for many years except pay my annual dues, more or less reluctantly and often with the thought that the Institute was just another subscription.

Like other similar bodies the Institute has experienced its ups and downs, and has passed through difficult periods. Once the first wave of enthusiasm, that led to the formation of the Institute and

carried it successfully over the early years, had subsided, the feeling gradually became fairly widespread that the Institute was more or less comatose, and that so far as one personally was concerned, it was of negligible practical importance or use. The average member had few opportunities of attending meetings of the Institute, and had little evidence of its activities apart from the Journal; which could in any case be bought for considerably less than the annual membership fee.

As a result there were some resignations, and new applications came forward reluctantly. The position was rendered more acute by the difficulties of the war years; and in December, 1943, our then President, Mr. T. C. Birch, sent out a circular letter to all members making a spirited appeal against apathy and misconceptions. In this letter Mr. Birch emphasised that the first essential in furthering the interests of the profession is professional solidarity, best expressed in a sense of loyalty to the Institute to which we belong; and that like all such professional organisations the Institute must be a co-operative concern if it is to serve any good purpose. Mere payment of one's subscription is not enough; personal effort and obligation are necessary, for what one gets out of an Institute depends very largely upon what one puts into it.

With Mr. Birch's letter was enclosed a copy of a statement by Professor H. H. Chapman of Yale University and others dealing with professional apathy of members of the Society of American Foresters, which also had evidently been experiencing the same difficulty. This statement is so pertinent and so ably worded that no apology is needed for quoting from it at some length:

"There are two main incentives for joining a professional society. One is self-interest and personal, financial benefit. The other is self-improvement through service and the advancement of a profession through co-operative efforts aimed at scientific discussion and exchange of ideas, and upholding of ethical, educational standards, and efficiency in practice.

"The Society has persistently, and in the face of considerable difficulty, maintained an open forum for discussion, not merely of disputed technological practice but in the field of controversial economics such as who or what agency should apply regulation to private cutting practices. In thus upholding the very foundations not only of democracy, but of professional integrity it may, as a Society, have fallen into temporary disrepute in the minds of men who take a partisan position, would regiment all opinion to the accomplishment of their aims and goals, and regard opposition as reactionary, destructive, and opposed to public welfare.

"No profession can survive as such when its ideas are regimented by the authority of any organisation, and no society, representing a profession, can hold the respect of its members when freedom of discussion or criticism is banished.

"We find that foresters are handicapped by isolation. So are country doctors. All the more need for them to maintain the bond with their profession, and by following up the literature, attending the meetings and contributing to the activities of the profession as far as is in their power, insure growth in place of stagnation, interest instead of apathy, and efficiency in co-operation rather than concentration on a narrow field.

"Professional interest, as contrasted to apathy, in a society of foresters can best be strengthened by placing it on a sounder financial basis . . . in the effort to give the Society the chance to function adequately in the improvement of its opportunities along all lines of sound professional interest and effective service of the Society. Every effort should be made to give personal service to its members, but we must expect from them in turn active support and participation in its efforts to improve professional standards and achieve the fundamental goals of professional service, namely the restoration of the forest resources of this country and their continuous improvement as a contribution to national welfare in all lines along which the influences of the forest extend."

This subject is further pursued in the Editorial Notes in the Journal published in 1944, which state that the feeling that all is not well with the Institute has become increasingly evident in recent years, both policy and constitution having been criticised, and urge every member to make an effort to answer the pertinent question: "Is membership of the Institute to be a hall mark of technical competence and professional integrity; or is self-interest and improved bargaining power to be the keynote of our activities? In short, do we aim at a professional society or one devoted primarily to narrower vocational interests?" To that question there can surely only be one answer, as even on the narrowest plane of self-interest an Institute of high professional standing could be of more practical value to its members.

Prospects for the future are bright. The large developmental schemes already in being or projected for the near future, in the exotic forests particularly, have placed forests and forestry well to the fore in the national picture, and must result in a marked increase within the next few years in the numbers engaged in our profession, so that under wise guidance the Institute can develop into a valuable and influential body, rendering good service not only to its members and to the cause of forestry, but also to the general well-being of the country as a whole.

To achieve this it must set its standards high, so that it may win general recognition as the authoritative body where forestry matters are concerned, and so that membership in it becomes regarded as a privilege to be sought, and deserved and not as something rather tiresome or superfluous. This means a deal of hard work, demanding

hearty co-operation from all and not mere loading of still further burdens upon the self-sacrificing few. Indeed their burden is already overdue for relief and the time does not appear far distant when it will be necessary to consider seriously the provision of something in the nature of permanent headquarters and at least one officer who can devote more than his brief spare time to the production of a journal of high standard and an adequate supply of suitable publicity, to keeping members in touch with activities, and to ensuring that the Institute's policy is put into effect.

It would be presumptuous on my part to lay down any policy principles, nor have I any intention of doing so ; it may not, however, be out of place to mention very briefly two matters, both of which have received attention in the past and are likely to demand it yet more strongly in the future.

First, the Institute should steadfastly endeavour to retain that freedom of discussion or criticism to which Professor Chapman refers as essential for any professional society in holding the respect of its members. It is inevitable that the majority of those qualified for membership of the Institute in New Zealand should be in the service of the State ; but it will be a sorry day for the Institute if it ever degenerates into a mere departmental adjunct, unable to express any views other than those adopted officially from time to time.

Second, it should be constantly borne in mind that forestry embraces many and varied activities, and that whether members are engaged upon the production of the raw material or its utilisation, in the indigenous or in the exotic forests, they are still equally engaged in the profession of forestry and are still equally members of the Institute.

This address is already overlong, although there are many points which might have been dealt with more fully. I only hope that it may have been of some use in giving you a little more knowledge of your Institute and its possibilities, and that you will all resolve from now on to give it that personal support which alone can make it the useful and successful organisation we all wish to see.