

Toil for Oil: 'The Czechs' Distilling Eucalyptus Oil at Tidbinbilla

Mark Butz and Geoff Puleston

Freelance consultant and writer Mark Butz researches social and environmental history with a focus on the Canberra area. He has almost completed a book on the history of the Molonglo-Jerrabomberra floodplain and has had a book published on Duntroon's World War I trench system. This article arises from recent work on heritage interpretation in the Tidbinbilla Valley.

Geoff Puleston has a passion for the bush – its history, poetry, music and storytelling. He has championed cultural heritage and community participation at Tidbinbilla for many years, and provides ad hoc European history advice to managers. He led recent projects to construct and interpret the eucalyptus oil distillery display near Black Flats and to develop a 'Rock Valley' Homestead Interpretive Hub.

This article builds on years of dedicated volunteer work by the Tidbinbilla Pioneers Association (TPA), in collaboration with the ACT Parks & Conservation Service, to research Tidbinbilla Valley history and to develop a cultural heritage precinct adjoining the Black Flats car park in Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve. The ACT Government made funding available under the ACT Heritage Grants Program for that project and for numerous others that have helped to build the information base behind the article.

On 3 February 1949 a man of short stature stepped up at the Albert Hall to receive Certificate Number 1, as the first naturalised Australian under the new Commonwealth *Nationality & Citizenship Act 1948*. Jan Jandura-Pucek was born in northern Slovakia (then part of Czechoslovakia) in 1914, and 35 years later he publicly renounced allegiance to his native homeland and accepted naturalisation as an Australian citizen.

This was a strongly symbolic and proudly Australian ceremony to inaugurate the new Act. Previously the non-Aboriginal population of Australia comprised British subjects and aliens, but now Australian citizenship could be granted – the honours of being first in that category going to Prime Minister Chifley, while Jan Jandura-Pucek, born outside the Empire, was the first alien to



JAN JANDURA PUCEK, 34, taking the oath administered by Mr. Justice Simpson. Ex-Czech, Pucek is a eucalyptus distiller near Canberra.

ABOVE: Jan Jandura Pucek taking the oath.

Source: *Pix Magazine*, 19 March, 1949, p.24

be naturalised. The Albert Hall was bedecked with Australian flags and the opening refrain was 'Advance Australia Fair'.

Representing each state and the ACT, seven Europeans (Czech, French, Danish, Spanish, Yugoslav, Norwegian and Greek, two tagged as being from 'behind the Iron Curtain') were naturalised on the day. The seven were billeted at the Kurrajong Hotel and were conscientiously hosted during their visit.

The ceremony was attended by about 150 people, drawn from Canberra diplomats and leading Canberra citizens, including 50 schoolchildren. It was filmed and sound recorded, with a radio broadcast, and was widely reported in newspapers and magazines, with *Pix* offering a two-page photographic spread. Prime Minister Chifley in his speech recognised that many immigrants had recently fled war-torn Europe and emphasised the importance of welcoming them as new citizens. It has been noted that his offer of opportunity, freedom and 'inclusivity' was rarely extended to migrants of colour, reflecting the White Australia policy.¹

At the time of his naturalisation, Jan Jandura-Pucek's address was Rock Valley,

Tidbinbilla, and for the previous eight years he had been a eucalyptus distiller. While it is likely that Jan was the first to step up at the naturalisation event because the ACT had primacy in the alphabet, it is an appealing thought that it was because his occupation was so essentially Australian.

Jan Jandura-Pucek's path to the Albert Hall was shaped by a number of earlier Czech immigrants. One was George Valdemar Simkovic, who arrived in Australia in 1929 and found work as a eucalyptus distiller at Burruga, near Oberon, NSW. In 1938 Simkovic was seeking access to potential oil distilling areas in the ACT. His approach was well received and he inspected several sites. His interest waned when samples from the Uriarra area tested below average for essential oil content. Nonetheless, he recommended that the Department allow his compatriot Martin Tekel to take up distilling options in his stead. Tekel was approved to operate for a year or two at Blue Range near Uriarra. This was welcomed as the first application to distil eucalyptus in the ACT for at least 25 years, and as a prelude and an aid to planned clearing for pine plantations, generating revenue in the interim.²

Tekel had previously travelled to Australia in 1928, along with at least two other Czechs, with all working as eucalyptus distillers at Burruga. It appears he went back home and returned in 1937, followed later in that year by fellow Czech Stefan (Steve) Lajcin, and both headed initially to the Oberon area. The two began operating at Blue Range late in 1938 and produced 384 gallons up to March 1939. At that time Tekel sought an arrangement to cut eucalyptus on the freehold property of Annie Flint at Rock Valley, Tidbinbilla. This reduced his liability to pay fees and royalties on oil produced from Crown land, and it would assist the widowed Mrs Flint with clearing the land.³

The life must have suited Tekel and Lajcin, as they appear to have then recruited Jan Jandura-Pucek, completing a team of three. The three were well known to each other, having originated in the same village of Habovka, in the mountains bordering Poland.

This was not a large place – even today the broader area has a population of about 1 350 people – so unsurprisingly the three were complexly inter-related. In January 1938 Jan had married Martin Tekel's daughter Cecilia. Martin's wife (Cecilia's mother) was the daughter of Jan's great-aunt. Martin's mother-in-law was also Jan's aunt, while Steve Lajcin's mother-in-law was also Martin Tekel's aunt.⁴

The three are frequently referred to as refugees from war-torn Europe, but this is over-simplified. Both Tekel and Lajcin emigrated in 1937, at a time when German nationalism was certainly on the rise in the country. Near the end of 1937 Hitler made clear his intention to move on Czechoslovakia, and the tensions led to annexation of the Sudetenland and other concessions that removed one-third of the country's population and all of its border defences. Jandura-Pucek emigrated in 1939, shortly before most of the country became a protectorate of the German Third Reich, attended by deportation of Jewish people and periods of martial law.⁵

This must have been a nervous time for all three of the Czechs, who had left behind their wives and children (Jan's wife was pregnant with their first child when he departed). They had the clear intention of sending money back home to their families, pending their return at some future time. They were now dependent on each other for their livelihoods and for the welfare of their families, and they were engaged in an industry that by its very nature would wax and wane.

Industry: the Good Oil

The antiseptic and healing properties of eucalyptus oils were widely known from the very early days of European settlement, not least because of observing use of eucalyptus leaves by Aboriginal people. Eucalyptus oil was the first singularly Australian primary and secondary production industry and was probably our earliest indigenous export. The earliest known distillation of oil was in 1789, when a sample was sent to England

for analysis. This indicated that the oil (from *Eucalyptus piperita* – Sydney Peppermint) had stronger beneficial properties than the traditional English herb peppermint (*Mentha piperita*).⁶

Distilleries were established on Kangaroo Island in the 1840s and in the Dandenong Ranges in the 1850s, the first by English pharmacist Francis H. Faulding with English physician Luther Scammell, and the latter by Yorkshire pharmacist Joseph Bosisto with German-Australian physician, geographer/explorer and notable botanist Baron Ferdinand von Mueller. Bosisto consigned the first exports in 1865, and until the 1940s/50s Australia was the largest supplier to the eucalyptus oil trade. The trade experienced a boom around World War I and the subsequent influenza epidemic as an antiseptic. Trade declined in the 1920s, and further in the 1930s and through the years of the Great Depression, when eucalyptus plantations were being established overseas, enabling cheaper production.⁷

By 1954 about 200 of the more than 700 eucalypt species and variants had been examined for essential oils, and of these less than 20 were being exploited for volatile oils. In southern NSW and the ACT the main source species were the narrow-leaved peppermint (now *E. radiata*) and broad-leaved peppermint (*E. dives*). Oil has been produced in Tasmania, north-west Victoria, South Australia, southern NSW and Queensland.⁸

Concerted efforts over many decades revealed multiple uses for eucalyptus oil. Medicinal properties included decongestant and antiseptic applications, dispensed in many different preparations. Industrial applications included use in manufacture of soaps, disinfectants, deodorants, germicides and synthetic menthol and thymol. For a time it was also extensively used in flotation separation of base-metal ores. Other applications included perfumery and food flavouring oils.⁹

Up to the mid 20th century the industry generally involved bulk buyers in a large town sourcing oil from numerous

independent distillers using crude field stills across hundreds of square kilometres of oil-producing bush. The product was first tested for oil properties by buyers at point of production, and then sent by road or rail to be re-distilled at refineries in Sydney or Melbourne. Most would be exported to Europe or the USA.¹⁰

In the southern tablelands of NSW numerous distilleries were to be found in the Snowy Mountains between Cooma and Tumut, around Braidwood, in the Tinderry Range, and in the northern Brindabella Range. In the ACT most of the distilleries were in the Uriarra area and Tidbinbilla Range, with at least one other in the north near Horse Park.¹¹

'Working the Eucy'

The process of distilling oil from eucalyptus leaves required relatively simple equipment but also 'bush mechanic' skills in construction and maintenance of the still and managing water and steam, as well as working safely with sharp axes and knives, and horse handling and care. Above all, perhaps, it required sustained hard work. It suited workers seeking independent and flexible employment requiring minimal skills or experience, but it was by nature isolated, physically arduous and prone to disruption by weather and seasons. 'Eucy'-cutting attracted many migrants from central Europe, perhaps because language

BELOW: L to R: Steve Lajcin, Jan Jandura-Pucek, Martin Tekel at their fodder shed, 1941.

Source: Tidbinbilla Pioneers Association Archives



was not a significant barrier and they brought experience and expertise in what was a relatively new industry in Australia.¹² The majority of Australians involved in the industry were said to be seasonal workers, who in some instances owned areas of land and combined wool growing with oil production.

The raw material for distilling was drawn from target species known to be rich in oil. Collection was slow and arduous, cutting branches from trees and removing leaves and terminal branchlets with a sharp bladed instrument. A specialised form was a sickle-shaped knife or 'eucy' hook, while others modified equipment, such as use at Tidbinbilla of a knife made from an old crosscut saw. The leaves were transported by cart to the still.

In some cases, forest trees were pollarded, cut to 50cm above the ground to encourage coppice sprouting of numerous smaller branches at a workable height, to be harvested again after two to three years. Other impacts on the forests arose from practices such as ringbarking of 'overmature' trees to provide space for younger saplings, and of non-oil-producing species to allow an increase in target species.¹³

Crude field stills were the most common due to low establishment cost, especially when materials could be scavenged, and due

to reasonable portability, useful in tablelands country so operators could move the still to leaf supplies rather than moving leaf over long distances to the still.

The generic 'stewpot' distillation method involved one (or coupled) tanks, squared or round, to total about 400 gallons (1 800 litres), with a lid that could be secured with a seal of clay or rubber. In simple forms, the tank was primed with about 80-100 gallons (360-450 litres) of water. Up to 1000lbs (450kg) of cut leaves would be loaded into the tank, and stamped down firmly, perched above the water on a steel mesh. The mesh and leaves would be inserted and later removed with a gantry or small crane pole. Some tanks were set below a loading stage to enable leaves to be forked in directly from a dray, also partly insulating the tank. A wood fire was lit directly underneath, or in more advanced systems under a separate boiler, to generate steam in the base of the tank. Both types required replenishment of the water during distilling, with a header tank topped-up manually or by mechanical regulation from a water race.

The steam was captured by one or more 2 inch (5cm) pipes close to the top of the tank. The condenser pipes then passed through a water race, stream or dam to condense the vapour, or in drier places through a 'worm coil' in an additional tank of water. The condensate would be captured at the end of the pipe in a collector drum where the oil separated from the water. To fill a 44 gallon drum would require around 4 to 5 tonnes of

BELOW: 'The Czechs': Jan Jandura-Pucek, Martin Tekel and Steve Lajcin, with Leslie (Ned) Blewitt (of 'Nil Desperandum') removing stewed leaves from the eucalyptus oil distillery at Hurdle Creek, Tidbinbilla.

Source: Tidbinbilla Pioneers Association Archives



BELOW: 'The still at Hurdle Creek.

Source: Tidbinbilla Pioneers Association Archives



leaves, with distillation times varying from 3 to 4 hours for *E. radiata* to 14 to 18 hours for *E. dives*.¹⁴

Rise and Fall

Distillers were hard put to 'make a decent living' until 1943 when the Commonwealth Prices Commissioner fixed prices at point of production. The price for *E. dives* oil went from 1/- per pound in 1939 to 4/6 per pound. These returns drew male workers away from farms, leading to some labour shortages. A robust worker could now earn £8 to £10 a day compared with £2 a day in farm work. Oil distillation expanded greatly in the late 1940s, taking the industry to its peak level, with total production of approximately 1000 tonnes, of which 70 per cent was exported.¹⁵

In the surrounding district this boom time led to employment of 800 to 1 000 men, dropping away somewhat by late 1951, when about 500 men worked approximately 130 plants. These levels of operation prompted concerns that the spread of distilleries might exceed the supply of bush available for production.¹⁶

It was reported in the Braidwood district that 'mild consternation' arose from the combination of a one-sixth reduction in prices being paid, an increase in time, effort and costs to gather leaves because forests were largely 'worked out', and several local buyers opting to suspend their purchases. Similar trends were apparent in the Tumut district where about 180 men were employed

in oil distillation in the late 1940s. In 1947 the district produced some 367 276 pounds (167 tonnes) of oil, with a value of about £50 000. However, from early in 1948 downturn was forecast, due largely to currency fluctuations affecting the American market, coupled with industrial unrest in Australia.¹⁷ Additional factors in this decline included post-World War II increases in labour costs, such that Australia was no longer competitive with overseas production, and increased priority being placed on wheat exports, leading to greater profitability in wheat farming and significant decrease in stands of high quality eucalyptus species.¹⁸

Profitability was already declining in the lead-up to a worldwide trade recession in 1952, from which exports almost completely ceased by early 1953 and production was severely curtailed. In the five-year period from 1947-48 to 1952-53 eucalyptus oil production declined nationally by nearly 40 per cent (and by 70 per cent in NSW), and export income value declined by more than 30 per cent. The upside was that over-exploited forests had a period of respite.¹⁹

The Australian market share continued to decline for decades, and imports of eucalyptus oil exceeded exports by the mid-1970s. From the peak of 1947 when production totalled 1 000 tonnes, it fell by 1980 to 200 tonnes, drawn from about 25 operations. By the early 1980s Australia produced only 3 per cent of the world trade.²⁰

It is worth noting that some operators in the local district departed the industry

BELOW: 'The Czechs' camp' at Tidbinbilla River.

Source: Tidbinbilla Pioneers Association Archives



BELOW: The still at Tidbinbilla River c. 1948.

Source: Tidbinbilla Pioneers Association Archives



in the face of widespread bushfires in 1957, attributed to escapes from eucalyptus distilleries. The potential for this had generated tension in the Braidwood area in the 1940s, with attempts to shut down distillery operations during summer months.²¹ It has also been suggested that the onset of works for the Snowy Mountains Scheme from 1949 offered expanded opportunities for work and more lucrative prospects for many, including migrant workers.

'The Czechs' at Work

Tekel, Lajcin and Jandura-Pucek – known collectively (and affectionately) as 'the Czechs' – worked a number of areas at Tidbinbilla over a ten year period, concentrated mostly on the western side of the river, including: the Forest Reserve (later Block 60) opposite 'Rock Valley' homestead; Annie Flint's land; and on Hurdle Creek near 'Nil Desperandum'. These areas have shown ample evidence of pollarded trees, a kind of 'calling card' of the distillers.²²

They did the hard work of cutting during the week, and on Friday transported the leaves to the still with horse and dray fitted with a tipping frame. The distilling took place through Saturday. Neighbour Eddie Green of 'Rock Valley' later recalled: 'The smell was marvellous on a Friday night. Once they got the steam going up, it'd drift down the valley ... It was always a beautiful smell.'²³

It took about two weeks of work to fill a 44 gallon drum with oil, which was worth approximately £196. Wilfred (Bill) Cranswick of Queanbeyan collected full drums about every three months and transported them by rail to Melbourne for refining and sale.²⁴

The three were well known to, and popular with, the locals in the valley, particularly the Green, Flint, Dallender and Blewitt families. They purchased most of their food from the locals – meat from Tom Green, vegetables from Annie Flint, and bread and butter from the Blewitts – and relied on neighbours or the mail driver for transport. They also joined the locals for regular games of cards, notably '500'.²⁵

The 'Czechs' camp' on the Tidbinbilla River on Annie Flint's freehold property comprised a bush hut of logs with a bark roof and two huts with sawn slab walls (timber from nearby Rayner's sawmill) and galvanised iron roofing. The still here contained large steel tanks, piping, timber supporting framework and stone foundations, serviced by a hand-operated timber crane. The cooling system was a 'long row of ponds' fed by races from the river. The still at Hurdle Creek was similar, but with two linked round tanks and a distinctive T-shaped flue.²⁶

The crew was regularly visited to collect returns for the oil distilled from Crown land, on which they paid royalties. Otherwise they enjoyed considerable freedom in their operations, although they were at times instructed to take precautions against fire. In 1939 wildfires had their origin in the vicinity of Tekel's distillery in the Uriarra area (the loss of forest prompting a move to Tidbinbilla), and this led to imposition of specific requirements for distillery operations and modified design of still equipment. Other requirements included avoiding trees inhabited by koalas when working to the west of Reid's 'Tidbinbilla' property.²⁷

Wartime brought some complications. By the end of the war, Tekel was indicating that he may have to cease operations because he could not obtain horse feed, but he had done well to stay in business that long. In 1944, all married men aged up to 35, and all single men up to 45, were required to undertake militia training with the Citizens Military Force (CMF). Eucalyptus oil production was an important industry during the War, and the Acting Forester Lindsay Pryor sought exemption for Tekel's crew (Lajcin aged 43 and Jan Jandura-Pucek aged 30). He also sought to provide two additional workers through wartime National Service, noting that 'continuous work was available'. This period might account for oral histories that there were five Czech eucalyptus cutters until two departed for Burruga.²⁸

Commonwealth records indicate a larger context for the arrival of the three Czechs, in a strong pattern of migration from

Habovka and its close neighbour Zuberec in the late 1920s and 1930s, all pursuing work with the eucalyptus oil industry, and all initially in the Isabella/Burruga/Oberon area, with some of them on the same voyages as Tekel and his crew. These connections warrant further study.²⁹

A Fortunate Life

Some modern marketing of eucalyptus oil may paint the industry of old in a romantic light. However, there is also, beneath a colourful legend, historical documentation of the lot of some of the 'bush poor', the 'have-nots' of a class-conscious rural society.³⁰

The story of the Czechs at Tidbinbilla contrasts with this latter portrayal in several notable ways: tight Government control over Crown Land in the Territory led to restricted allocation and use, with forests in the Cotter catchment firmly off-limits. There was no scope for multiple operators, and that meant Tekel and his crew could work multiple areas without

competition and without the need to shut down or move the still when cut-out areas needed to recover. Rather, they built a second camp and still, and alternated their areas of operation every three to four years. They did not have employees working separately in cutting or distilling, instead being interdependent and mutually supportive in both key roles.

They were spared having to do service with the CMF, and were even supplied with additional workers from the CMF; many eucalyptus distillers were enlisted in NSW, suggesting that the ACT authorities, having only one distillery crew operating, were more protective of their work than was the case in NSW. Significantly, they were not deemed to have low status in that rural society – they were well accepted and well respected, particularly for their strong work ethic, and were active and welcome participants in the social life of the close-knit Tidbinbilla valley community. In any event, they did quite well as self-employed workers, aided by not having to pay royalties when working freehold land (a major part of their operation). This relative prosperity may not have been evident in their rustic camps, but it is reflected in images of the three 'suited up' to visit town.

BELOW: Lajcin, Tekel and Jandura-Pucek dressed for town, with Edie Blewitt.

Source: Tidbinbilla Pioneers Association Archives



Beginning of the End

Despite their evident good fortune, the three Czechs began to fold up their business in the late 1940s. Soviet Russia liberated Czechoslovakia from Germany in 1945, and its new government was dominated by the Communist Party. From 1948 until the mid 1950s the population experienced purges, executions, imprisonments, and strong restrictions on churches. Although conditions were not favourable as the Cold War in Europe intensified, Tekel and Lajcin decided to return home.

Jandura-Pucek chose a completely different path. In 1948 he secured Landing Rights in Australia for his wife and the son he had not yet met, and he set in motion his naturalisation. He received character references from Tom Green of 'Rock Valley' Tidbinbilla, Wilfred Cranswick, storekeeper and oil agent of Queanbeyan, and Francis Lyons Williams JP of Queanbeyan. Meanwhile, the Commonwealth Investigation Service determined that he 'was not adversely recorded', so there was no security objection to his naturalisation. The Sergeant of Police in Queanbeyan went further on the basis of having known him for eight years to be 'a very hard working man and law abiding citizen', with 'an excellent character', noting that he had been 'very patriotic' during the War.³¹

In February 1949, before his family landed, Jan had been picked up by a Commonwealth car from the 'Rock Valley' homestead at Tidbinbilla and transported to the Albert Hall ceremony. In March he was reunited with his wife Cecilia after an absence of ten years, and he met for the first time his nine-year-old son Vendelin (Vendo). They stayed with the Green family while Jan made some improvements to the men's camp. It appears that Cecilia missed being reunited with her father Martin Tekel before his departure for home. He died in Czechoslovakia in 1952, being spared a turbulent period there in the 1960s, culminating in the Soviet invasion in 1968. Steve Lajcin later returned to Australia and resumed eucalyptus oil work for a time before

again returning home. He died in Habovka in 1973. Czechoslovakia remained under Communist control until 1990.³²

Another Wave of Eucy Cutters

The closure in mid-1949 of the operations of Tekel, Lajcin and Jandura-Pucek did not spell the end of eucalyptus cutting in the ACT, and by 1959 a new crew was operating in Tidbinbilla. One was Todor Velijan Stojanovich, born in Yugoslavia, who appears to have been operating on Annie Flint's property. The other cutter is said to have come from Poland, his identity not yet confirmed. Like the Czechs before them, both had left their families in Europe, and they sent money to help with food and education for their children. During this time they were distressed to hear of a major earthquake in Yugoslavia, probably the Skopje earthquake in July 1963. They were driven into Canberra and the Red Cross was able to inform them that their families were unharmed.³³

The new wave of distillers continued to cut eucalyptus in the Hurdle Creek area until 1958, using a different still from that used by the Czechs. They continued to cut until the forests became part of the Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve in a series of acquisitions up to 1964.³⁴

Block 60 to the west of the Tidbinbilla River was made available to eucalyptus distillers from 1956, as this area was programmed for pine plantation in the late 1950s to early 1960s. The licensee was R.P. Sargent of Queanbeyan, making use of equipment owned by A.J. (Arthur Johnson) Bedwell, who had interests in distilleries across southern NSW. Sargent was apparently working alone, and in 1957 he was replaced by Stan Dolgerski and Dan Petrovich, and in 1958 by Z. Mitrovich and G. Lestich, suggesting a continuing pattern of distilleries operated by European migrants. This turnover might reflect the difficulty of running such an operation with only one or two workers, in a time when returns were falling.³⁵

The dealer A.J. Bedwell came into the industry in an interesting way. He was working as a tailor in Sydney when one of

his rural customers, a eucalyptus distiller from Braidwood, elected to pay for his new suit with a barrel of oil. Because he had no difficulty selling on the oil, he sought more and by 1919 left tailoring. He became the largest eucalyptus oil agent in NSW through several decades, and rode the peak of the industry.³⁶

Life in Sydney

After leaving Tidbinbilla, Cecilia and Vendelin followed Jan's example and gained their citizenship in 1952, strengthening the family's identity as Australians. Jan's father's surname was Jandura-Pucek, the Pucek from his mother's maiden name. Back in Habovka this had been useful in distinguishing their family from other Jandura groups for postal deliveries, but here it was a complication and Jan dropped it from his surname. Jan had already become known as John, said to be because Australians did not recognise that Jan began with a 'Y' sound, and with a 'J' sound it was seen as a girl's name. It was easier to change his name by deed poll to the anglicised John Jandura, and in amending his Certificate of Naturalisation, he added Vendelin's name as well.³⁷

John wanted to put his bush skills to a productive purpose, perhaps on the land or in a market garden in Sydney. Cecilia, however, was not so enthusiastic and when the family moved to Sydney John worked with ACI (previously Australian Glass Manufacturers) in Waterloo. Their first house was a two-storey terrace in Surry Hills (a far cry from the bush camp at Tidbinbilla). In 1962, now with a second son, they moved to a house in Willoughby, on a large block where John could tend a productive vegetable garden. They remained there until John's death in 1978.³⁸

Commemoration

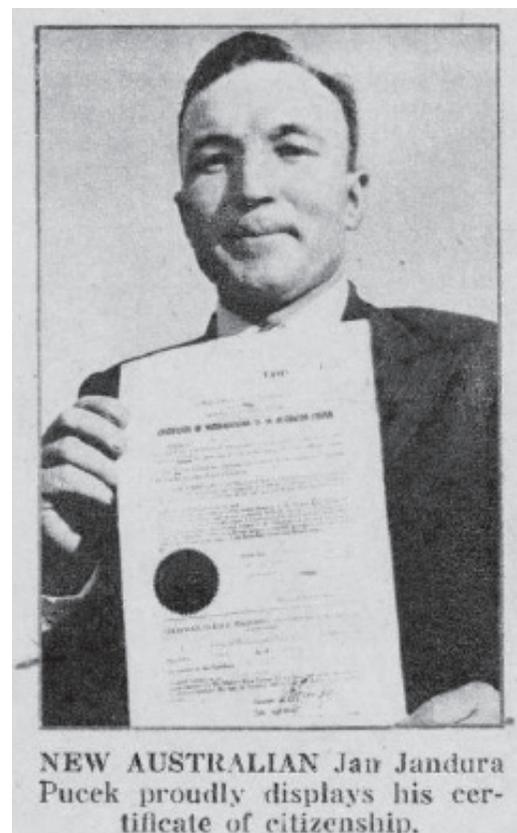
The year 1999 marked the 50th anniversary of Australia's first naturalisation and citizenship ceremony. The Tidbinbilla Pioneers Association and Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve

celebrated the occasion with a ceremony to unveil a plaque at the site of the 'Czechs' camp' and distillery, attended by John Jandura's widow, sons and their families. Later that year, an area on Sullivans Creek in O'Connor was named Jandura Park with a plaque unveiled by the Embassy of the Slovakian Republic, formally recognising Jan Jandura's role in the citizenship ceremony and his profile as a successful migrant in Canberra and Sydney.

The plaque at the 'Czechs' camp', now marked by the Black Flats car park, was subsequently purloined. However, their industry and contribution is now recognised in a static interpretive display comprising two Canberra Tracks signs and a simulation of their still, based on contemporary photographs. This longstanding idea was finally realised in 2020. The installation

BELOW: Jan Jandura.

Source: *Pix Magazine*, 19 March 1949, p.25

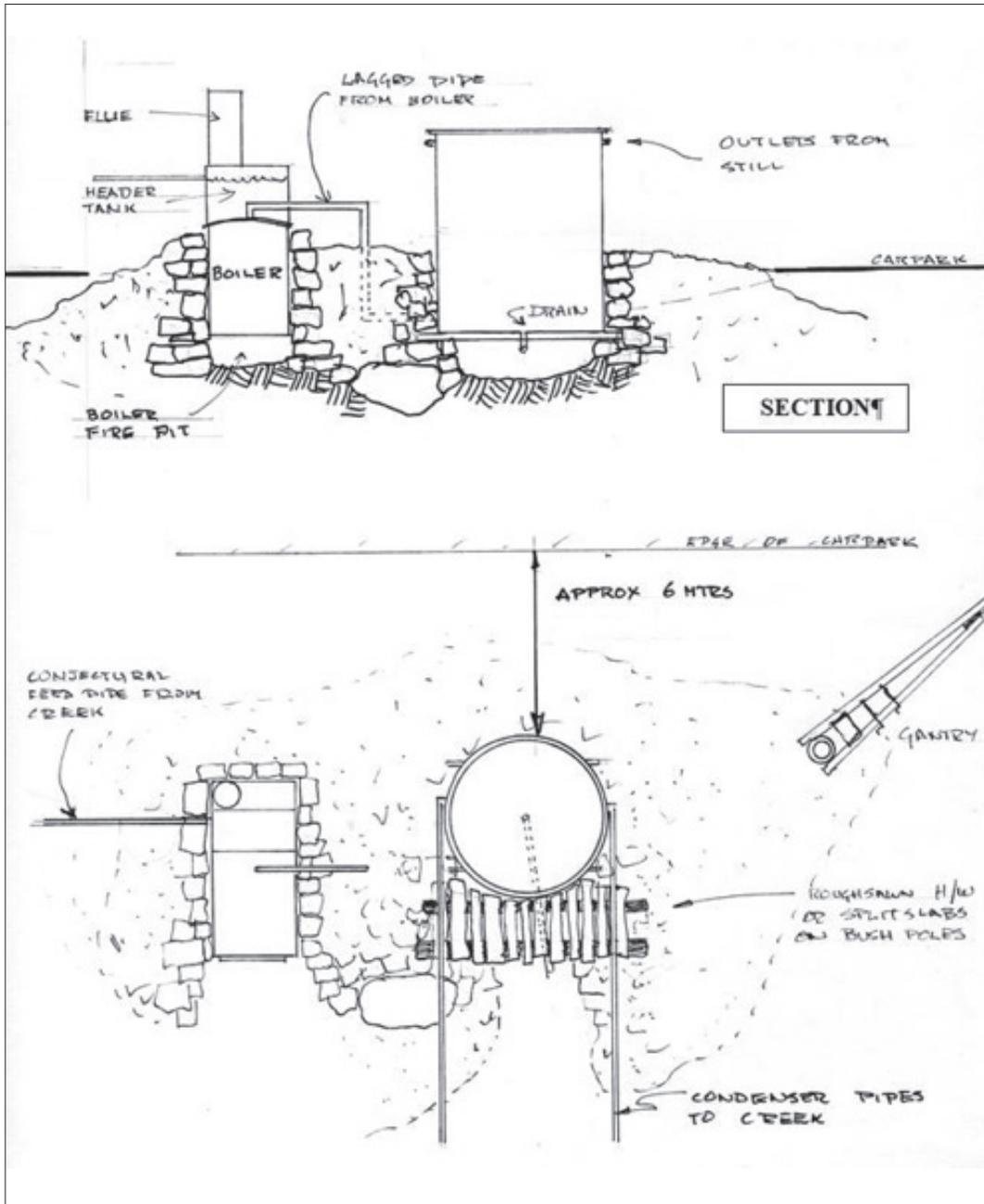


uses one of the original still tanks, which was supposed to have been buried when the site was cleared in 1963. However, it was concealed nearby and used as a source of steel plate, only to be rescued and pressed

into service once again. The operation at Hurdle Creek has also had renewed interpretation and walking trail access in the Nil Desperandum precinct. These projects are contributing to emergence of a new Canberra Tracks itinerary under the banner 'Tidbinbilla Heritage'.³⁹

BELOW: Design plan for simulated eucalyptus still at Black Flats car park.

Source: Pip Giovanelli, 2020





ABOVE: Reinstated and interpreted still at the Black Flats car park, 2020.

Source: Geoff Puleston

ENDNOTES

- 1 'Seven Europeans receive naturalisation papers at Canberra ceremony', *Canberra Times*, 4 Feb 1949, p. 4; Jean Shannon, 'Two of Australia's first naturalised citizens', *Canberra Times*, 18 Feb 1988, p. 14; 'Seven New Australians: first aliens receive citizenship under new Act' *Pix* (Sydney), 19 Mar 1949, pp. 24-25; 'They became Australian Citizens', *To Ethnico Vema*, 20 Sept 1950:7; NAA: C102, 1557105; Film version NFSA/NMA.
- 2 NAA:A1, 1936/5514; ArchivesACT: 38/8/F.
- 3 *Ibid.*
- 4 SBS Recording: 'First Australian citizenship given to Czechoslovak Jan Jandura-Pucek', interview with John Jandura-Pucek [son], 2019; Ancestry.com.
- 5 Chronology of Slovakian history throughout is drawn from Britannica.com: Czechoslovak history.
- 6 Hugh Alan Kemp Harris, 'Selection and breeding of 'Eucalyptus radiata' subsp. 'radiata' to improve the economics of essential oil production.' Masters Degree Thesis by Research, University of New England, March 2002; P. S. Abbott, 'Commercial eucalyptus oil production.' In *Proceedings of the Eucalyptus Oil Production Seminar held at Gnowangerup*. Western Australian Department of Agriculture, 1989; D. J. Boland, J. J. Brophy, & A. P. House (eds), *Eucalyptus Leaf Oils, Use, Chemistry, Distillation and Marketing*. Melbourne, Inkata Press, 1991.
- 7 Harris 2002; Abbott 1989; B. E. J. Small, 'The Australian eucalyptus oil industry – an overview.' *Australian Forestry*, vol. 44 no. 3, 1981, pp. 170-177; Boland et al. 1991.
- 8 A. R. Penfold and J. L. Willis, 'The essential oil industry of Australia.' *Economic Botany*, vol. 8, no. 4, Oct-Dec 1954, pp. 316-336; Australian Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering [AATSE], *Technology in Australia 1788-1988*. Melbourne, Australian Science and Technology Heritage Centre, 1988, pp. 225-226: <http://www.austehc.unimelb.edu.au/tia/236.html>
- 9 Michael Pearson, 'The good oil: eucalyptus oil distilleries in Australia.' *Australasian Historical Archaeology*, vol. 11, 1993, pp. 99-107.
- 10 Penfold & Willis, 1954, pp. 320-322.
- 11 David Lindley, 'Eucalyptus oil industry in the northern Snowy Mountains.' ms, n.d.; Michael Pearson, 'Gungahlin pastoral places comparative assessment', for Heritage Unit, Environment ACT, March 2002; 'Tinderry Nature Reserve plan of management', NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, October 1998, p. 4; personal communication to the author, 2021.
- 12 'Give me a home among the gum trees: Tekel's eucalyptus oil distillery, 1938.' ArchivesACT *Find of the Month*, February 2017.

- 13 Pearson 1993; Philip Morton, 'Eucalyptus oil distilling a major local industry by 1890s.' *Southern Highland News* (Bowral, NSW), 6 June 2016.
- 14 Lindley n.d.; A. R. Penfold, 'Eucalyptus oils.' *Environment*, vol. 1, no. 3, 1934, pp. 5-14; Penfold & Willis, 1954, pp. 321, 326; Pearson, 1993; Des Shiel, *Eucalyptus: essence of Australia: the story of the Eucalyptus oil industry – and of the 'eucy' men, and their contribution to the Australian bush tradition*. Carlton, Vic., Queensbury Hill Press, 1985; Morton, 2016.
- 15 Penfold & Willis, 1954, p. 335; 'Tumut Eucalyptus industry on wane', *Tumut and Adelong Times*, 6 January 1948, p. 6; Lindley n.d.; Small, 1981.
- 16 Pearson, 1993, p. 102
- 17 'Fall in eucalyptus oil', *Braidwood Dispatch & Mining Journal*, 14 July 1950, p. 1; Lindley n.d. citing: 'Tumut eucalyptus industry on wane', *Tumut and Adelong Times*, 6 January 1948, p. 6; 'Our open column. Eucalyptus industry in Tumut district', *Tumut and Adelong Times*, 20 January 1948, p. 2; 'Eucalyptus oil worth £50,000 in Tumut dist.', *The Land* (Sydney), 5 March 1948, p. 10.
- 18 Philip Morton, 'Highlands history: eucalyptus oil industry.' *Southern Highland News* (Bowral, NSW), 13 June 2016.
- 19 Penfold & Willis, 1954, pp. 320, 335.
- 20 AATSE, 1988; Small, 1981, p. 174; Boland et al, 1991, p. 4; Pearson, 1993, p. 101.
- 21 *Tinderry Nature Reserve plan of management*, 1998, pp. 16, 21; Lindley n.d. citing 'The eucalyptus industry and impossible regulations', *Braidwood Review and District Advocate*, 22 September 1942, p. 2.
- 22 Monica Flint, *To green the memory: a story of the Green and Hatcliff families of Tidbinbilla*. Tharwa, ACT, 1983; Frank Ingwersen, 'Tidbinbilla.' Conservation series no. 5, draft ed., n.d.
- 23 Margaret Park, Transcript of interview with Eddie Green conducted at Rock Valley Homestead, Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve, 25 September 2008 ; Flint, 1983.
- 24 Margaret Park, Transcript of interview with Eddie Green conducted at Batlow, NSW, 16 October 2008; Flint, 1983; Matthew Higgins (comp.), *Remembering Tidbinbilla*. Hackett, ACT, Tidbinbilla Pioneers Association, 1995, p. 45.
- 25 Flint, 1983, citing Eddie Green; Higgins, 1995: Eddie Green, pp. 40-47; Keith Green, pp. 21-27; Thelma Cabban, pp. 62-68.
- 26 David Bulbeck & Philip Boot, *Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve: cultural resource survey and conservation plan*. Canberra, ACT Heritage Unit and ACT Parks & Conservation Service, 20 May 1991; Flint, 1983; Park, 2008; Higgins, 1995, p. 43.
- 27 ArchivesACT: 38/8/F.
- 28 ArchivesACT 38/8/F; Higgins, 1995, p. 44.
- 29 ArchivesACT 38/8/F; NAA: C102, 1557105.
- 30 Shiel, 1985.
- 31 NAA:A441, 1952/13/7732
- 32 Flint, 1983.
- 33 ACT Electoral Roll: ACT – Outlying areas 1959; NAA:A446, 1956/57470; Norman Robinson, 'Tidbinbilla memories' ms dated June 1993; ArchivesACT: L/20/154.
- 34 ACT Heritage Council, 'Background information, Nil Desperandum Homestead and surrounds, Block 143, Paddys River District, July 2015'; Bulbeck & Boot, 1991.
- 35 ArchivesACT: 38/8/F.
- 36 Geoffrey Davis, 'Cultivation and production of eucalypts in Australia: with special reference to the leaf oils.' Ch. 7 in John Coppen (ed.), *The Genmatius Eucalyptus*. Bristol, PA, Taylor & Francis, 2002, p. 195.
- 37 Eddie Green, 'Jan Jandura Pucek of Tidbinbilla: first naturalised Australian citizen – 3 February 1949.' Ms, 1999; NAA: A441, 1952/13/7732.
- 38 Electoral rolls 1903-1980; Find-a-Grave Index 1800s-current; John Jandura interview, 2019.
- 39 Ingwersen, n.d.; Bulbeck & Boot, 1991, p. 111 (Don Fletcher); Mark Butz, 'Heritage interpretation strategy: eucalyptus oil distillery, Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve ACT.' Prepared for the Tidbinbilla Pioneers Association, September 2020; Mark Butz, 'Heritage interpretation strategy: Rock Valley Homestead and surrounds, Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve ACT.' Prepared for the Tidbinbilla Pioneers Association, February 2021; Pip Giovanelli, 'Back Flat eucalyptus still: proposed reconstruction.' Prepared for the Tidbinbilla Pioneers Association, 2020.