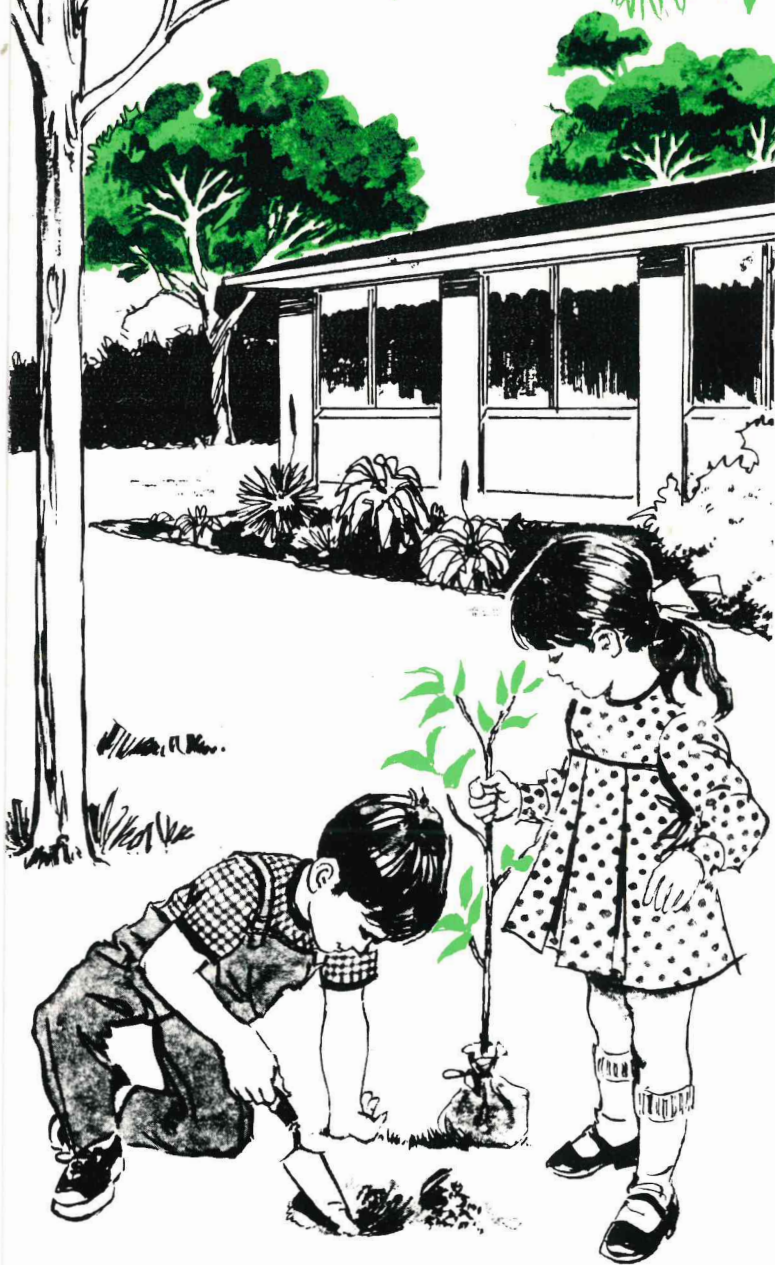


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ARBOR DAY



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THE ORIGIN AND MEANING

In many countries it has long been the tradition to hold annually a tree or forest festival. The origin of such celebrations must date back to antiquity and be lost in the dawn of religious feeling and awe for what trees represented. However, Arbor Day, as it is commonly known today, is of American origin and grew out of conditions peculiar to the Great Plains. It was first observed in Nebraska in 1872.

The idea, conceived by J. S. Morton, then a member of the Nebraska State Board of Agriculture, was one of forest conservation. It was a move to promote replanting, following deforestation, and to plant up treeless areas. This idea has spread widely to other lands where it is variously celebrated as the "Festival of the Trees", "Greening Week" of Japan, "The New Year's Day of the Trees" in Israel, "The Treeloving Week" of Korea, "The Reforestation Week" of Yugoslavia, "The Students' Afforestation Day" of Iceland and "The National Festival of Tree Planting" in India. Arbor Day in its various forms is now recognised in more than fifty countries of the world.

Arbor Day was first observed in Australia (in Victoria) in 1909. In Western Australia the celebration of this day was provided for in the Forests Act which became law in 1919. Officially, the day is the first Wednesday in July, but the date may be altered to suit the climatic conditions of any particular district.

THE IMPORTANCE OF TREES TO MAN

Trees influence human welfare in many different ways. From them we obtain timber for construction purposes, fuel for the fire, plywood, paper, cardboard, celluloid, rayon, rubber, tannin, cork, drugs, resins, fruit, nuts, honey and numerous other commodities necessary to our present civilisation. Trees also play a major part in soil and water conservation, they provide shade and shelter from the sun and wind and beautify the countryside and cities. It may be said of our cities that no single item distinguishes them more than their green areas and probably one's first reaction to a community is its lack or abundance of trees.

A few minutes' thought is sufficient to make one realise that trees and tree products are so intimately woven into our everyday life that it is difficult to imagine how we would fare without them. Past civilisations have disappeared through failing to appreciate such benefits. Proud and powerful empires have vanished under stress, not of an invading army, but of reckless destruction of the country's trees and the consequent loss of soil, water and commodities which supported human life. The Dustbowl of America, great deserts of Northern Africa, Syria, Palestine, Israel, Jordan, Arabia and parts of India, are all essentially caused or aggravated by man, while thoughtless exploitation is increasing desert areas in America, Australia and other countries today.

The covering of vegetation which nature uses to protect the earth and its inhabitants has been developed over many thousands of years. A large Jarrah forest tree may have taken 300 years to grow—many of these trees now passing through our timber mills were probably in existence when Dampier first visited these shores. Many are older still!

Economic necessity requires certain trees to be felled for timber production but wanton destruction of trees must be prevented at all costs.

THE IMPORTANCE OF ARBOR DAY

On Arbor Day, particular attention is drawn to the part trees play in our lives. It is not just a day to plant trees and then to forget the gesture for another twelve months. Planting a tree one day is no credit to a person if, during the rest of the year, he neglects to care for it and those already growing. Our thoughts on Arbor Day should be as sincere as those on Mother's Day; they should be an expression of enduring feeling, thought and action and not just one single, isolated flame of interest.

In schools this day is celebrated with the children planting trees in the school grounds, along nearby streets, or in school plantations. School plantations are not yet common in this State, but in other countries they provide both interest and study for the children and a future source of income which

helps to pay for school amenities. A child who is able to take part in the establishment and tending of a plantation is better able to understand the absorbing story of tree growth and to appreciate the value of trees in our civilisation today.

Nature was generous in her gift of forest wealth to this State. We are fortunate in having magnificent and adequate forests available for our use. Actually, we are spoilt in this regard, and many of us tend to take trees for granted. It is our responsibility as citizens, to ensure that gardens, parks and streets are enhanced by tree planting to provide that beauty, shade and protection which makes for pleasant living and happy recreation. The farmer must be interested in protecting his soil, water, and stock by having sufficient tree growth on the property. The wood-lot is an important part of farm economy as the trees, when mature, provide both timber and fuel for the farmer's use.

When driving through farming areas, it is depressing to see wide paddocks almost completely denuded of tree growth and the stock, in mid-summer, huddling in the shade of one or two small straggly trees. Even more depressing and surprising are the numerous farmhouses standing bare, exposed to wind, rain, dust and sun, when a few trees left during clearing operations or planted when building the house, could make living conditions so much more favourable.

We are a young country and have been liberally endowed with natural forests, but we must not

consider Western Australia as an exception to the general need for conservation. Recent surveys of our forest resources indicate that though we have adequate timber for our immediate needs, increasing population will cause demand to exceed supply.

Arbor Day plantings are the expression of an ideal. An ideal of trees, of forestry and conservation which it is hoped that the planter will carry throughout his life. A spirit of good citizenship which cries out against destruction, protecting the growing tree, of planting the new, makes this country of ours a healthier, happier place to live in.

Well may it be said that there is no country in the world which would not benefit directly or indirectly, socially as well as economically, from the planting of more and more trees.

This Arbor Day then, let us all plant trees around our homes, schools, streets, farms and in our forests and plantations. Let us all try to understand and practice the true spirit of the day and pave the way to conservation and continued comfort and prosperity in Western Australia. Let us remember the following words by Oliver Wendell Holmes—

Whenever we plant a tree, we are doing what we can to make our planet a more wholesome and happier dwelling place for ourselves and those who come after us.