

WHAT WOULD HENRY TRELOAR DO? Dr Sandi Robb for Cottage Gardening in Queensland: from the point of view of utility Treasure # 42 in *50 Treasures, Celebrating 50 years of James Cook University*, 2020

From March onwards it is “autumn” in Townsville. New pea sprouts rupture through the soil in two neat rows while cucumbers climb the trellis nearby. Ever faithful to this time of year, corn stands to attention as it extends its arms towards the sky, while tomatoes protest to the restraint of wooden garden stakes by finding new ways to ramble and spread out in any direction they find. This is my garden in the traditional working class suburb of Railway Estate. It is a utopia of production, which fulfils an unrequited requirement to feed the household in an age where mass food production undercuts seasonal eating and sparks rebellion through the slow food movement. Every night as the hose sprinkles over my aspirational feast, I ask myself *what would Henry Treloar do?*

Two little volumes *Cottage Gardening in Queensland, The Fourth Edition, December 1915* and *Cottage Gardening in Queensland, 1920*, are the only two of a five volume series of pamphlets held in James Cook University’s Special Collections. There are three reasons for their significance to the collection: for their social commentary of the first two decades of the twentieth century; as a practical guide to north Queensland gardening; and as a carriage service to incite anti-Chinese sentiment in line with the new Federated Australia and the White Australia Policy.

Small in size, but jam-packed with information, these two volumes provide a noteworthy guide to the management, preparation and production of fruit and vegetables for any *man* who had a ‘small’ back yard (a quarter acre/1000square metres) in north Queensland. Espousing the positive benefits of vegetable gardening to health, body and pocket, through the growing of tropical fruit and household vegetables, author Henry Treloar deftly assigns the vegetable patch, or ‘cottage garden’ as he likes to call it, to Federation Man. This comes at a crucial time when women in Queensland had just won the right to sit in parliament (1915) and the White Australia Policy had become well and truly embedded in the national psyche.

Locally produced in Townsville and printed at T. Willmetts and Sons, Flinders Street East, the pamphlets stand testament to time despite his odd and rambling style. In his Fourth Edition, December 1915, Treloar introduces the personality of tropical fruits and vegetables including where they like to be planted, and with whom they like to be planted. In particular, he outlines what vegetable does *not suit* the pernicky climes of Townsville, such as Brassica, while extolling the virtues of varieties long gone from household menus, such as granadillas and grapes.

While loquacious throughout his 1915 work, any attempt in his later 1920 edition, to reign in the self-indulgent waffle and limit the sometimes nonsensical poetical journey of gardening itself, failed miserably. Like a grasshopper on a leaf, Treloar’s formidable style snuck in and made its presence felt, proving difficult to eradicate. In addition, the author’s obsession with controlling his environment through his use of questionable home pesticide remedies, provided disturbing insight into the lengths he would go to in order to achieve his goal despite their health risk.

Both pamphlets, written at times of social uncertainty —during World War One in 1915, and later the Spanish Flu pandemic in 1920— remain important for their social commentary as a post-Federation society dominated by and for, the White Man in the Tropics.

With competition for produce coming directly from Chinese gardeners in and around Townsville, Henry Treloar makes no effort to hide his contempt. He makes his plea to the average kind of bloke, to gather their shovels and protect the economic and moral interests of local White men and women for ‘the benefit of our own kith and kin.’

Despite having sustained the Townsville community with fresh fruit and vegetables since first settled in 1864, antagonism towards Chinese gardeners had steadily increased over the decades and was validated by new laws introduced by the Commonwealth at Federation. Chinese settlers were designated alien status under the *Commonwealth Immigration Act 1901*, even if they had previously been naturalised as British Subjects. In his publications, Henry Treloar took an oath to uphold the White Australia Policy by clearly rejecting Townsville’s Chinese as aliens in his garden.

The language was emotive. He wrote, ‘there is a blot on our escutcheon, a blot that must be erased- a social blot, a commercial blot, an economic blot - a blot of such magnitude as threatens to obscure us’. In writing this, he successfully defines the social divide by using ‘Us’ or ‘Them’ language, and in doing so, relegates the Chinese community to the ‘Other’: despised, denounced and to be destroyed.

The very heart of Treloar’s gardening argument revealed as a desire to control his economic environment by planting the seeds of the White Australia Policy one row at a time, firmly in the minds of his readers. His main intention, the underpinning focus for his publication, was to manipulate the reader to boycott the production, sale, purchase and eating of fruit and vegetables grown by local Chinese men.

Henry Treloar from Redruth Cottage, North Ward, emerges as a self-made entrepreneur: an enthusiast for life, garden tragic and lover of poetry. However, he also emerges as an inciter of bigotry, a divider within the community and masterful manipulator, as he poisoned his readers with anti- Chinese sentiment with the same zeal he applied to eradicating the garden pests with whatever method came to hand.