

# Honorary doctorate conferred on "father of forestry education"

**P**eter McKelvey, foundation Professor of the New Zealand School of Forestry, received a Doctor of Science (honoris causa) from the University of Canterbury on 8<sup>th</sup> April 2004. Before an audience that included the University Council, academic staff, forestry and engineering graduates, and forestry colleagues, he was deservedly recognised for developing first-class forestry education in New Zealand. The conferment was greeted with acclamation.

Both the citation delivered by Professor Roger Sands and the address by Professor Peter McKelvey are reproduced below.

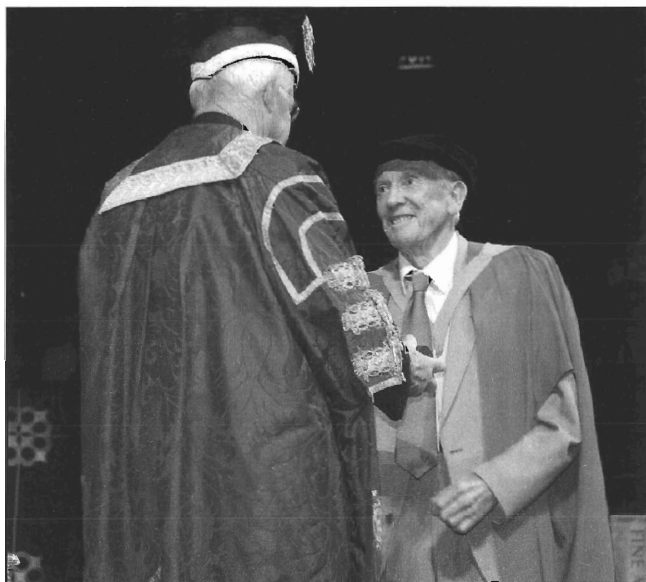
## Citation delivered by Professor Roger Sands

We are honouring today an eminent ecologist, educationalist, forest historian and manager, all in the field of professional forestry in New Zealand.

Peter McKelvey was born in Dunedin, New Zealand in 1926. From 1945 to 1948 he was a trainee with the New Zealand Forest Service during which time he undertook his Bachelor of Science degree part-time from the University of New Zealand out of Canterbury University College. He followed this, from 1949 to 1951, by a Bachelor of Science in Forestry degree from the University of Edinburgh.

On returning from UK to New Zealand, Peter found himself back in a project in which he had already served two field seasons in the forests of western Southland. This was the National Forest Survey, a ten year timber and ecological inventory of New Zealand's indigenous forests. This time he led fly-camping parties through the West Taupo and Urewera forests in the North Island. The National Forest Survey led to his life-long interest in the indigenous forests, their ecological processes and their management.

His excellent record in the National Forest Survey was recognised so that when the officer in charge of the project became seriously ill, Peter was appointed in administrative charge. To have been elevated to this important post at such an early stage in his career was testament to his superb research and management skills. In 1957 Peter was one of the co-authors of the final landmark report of the National Forest Survey that became the basis of much forest policy for the next several decades. After 1957, Peter McKelvey became Senior Scientific Officer at the Forest Research Institute and was involved in further ecological research into the indigenous forests of the North Island. He published many significant publications based on this period of his career.



*Professor Peter McKelvey receiving his Doctor of Science (honoris causa) from Dr Robin Mann, Chancellor of the University of Canterbury.*

In 1962 Peter McKelvey left the Forest Research Institute and was posted to the Head Office of the Forest Service in Wellington as Protection Forestry Officer where he was responsible for the overall management of the steep-land state protection forests and also the control of deer, possums, goats, chamois and tahr on all unoccupied land. There was a political dimension to the latter where his role involved establishing control priorities and developing management systems.

In 1966 Peter McKelvey was appointed Conservator of Forests in the Forest Service Wellington Conservancy, which stretched from Hawkes Bay in the east to Taranaki in the west and extended south to the capital, so including the intriguing sand-stabilising forests on the west coast.

However, his position as Conservator was short lived because the University of Canterbury, in collusion with the New Zealand Forest Service, approached him and invited him to apply for the Foundation Chair of Forestry at the University of Canterbury. He was considered by both the University of Canterbury and the New Zealand Forest Service to be the ideal candidate because of his wide experience, his ecological outlook, his proven leadership skills and the widespread respect he enjoyed from the forestry profession. Peter was at first reluctant to apply because he was enjoying himself in his current position as Conservator. He was finally persuaded to do so and history has shown that it was an excellent

decision for the University and the forestry profession in New Zealand, as well as for Peter himself.

Peter McKelvey was appointed to the Foundation Chair of Forestry at the University of Canterbury in 1967 and his first tasks were to oversee the construction of a suitable building, appoint the staff and design a curriculum. Professor McKelvey travelled the world in 1967 and 1968 looking at the management and curriculum of other prominent forestry schools and the curriculum he developed at Canterbury was warmly welcomed by the New Zealand forest industry and professional forestry bodies. Furthermore, because of Professor McKelvey's standing in the New Zealand forest industry, he was able to supplement the undergraduate teaching in the first few years with guest lecturers covering a wide range of expertise. He convinced two large forestry companies to fund an annual visiting fellowship. A field station was built at Hari Hari in Westland with a major contribution from the relict Timber-workers Housing Pool Account. A Chair in Wood Science was endowed by NZ Forest Products Limited. All of the above initiatives and successes were directly attributable to the administrative skills, perspicacity and personality of Professor McKelvey.

The graduates were keenly sought by industry right from the start. It was no real surprise, therefore, that the Commonwealth Forestry Association engaged the then Head of the Commonwealth Forestry Institute at Oxford University, Professor Harley, to visit and assess the standing of the Canterbury Forestry School. As a consequence of Harley's very favourable report, the School, even with its relatively few academic staff and even after such a short time from inception, was given the status of an accredited National School of Forestry that was able to award the Schlich Medal and the Commonwealth Book Prize. This early recognition was due almost entirely to Professor McKelvey's diligent pursuit of high personal standards.

Peter McKelvey was awarded an OBE in 1985 for his services to forestry, the same year in which he retired from the university, was appointed an Emeritus Professor and was made an honorary member of the New Zealand Institute of Forestry. Peter was elected as a Fellow of the New Zealand Institute of Forestry in 1988.

Peter kept publishing after he retired from the University. He published two books with the University of Canterbury Press. The first of these was on steep-land forests and is an account of the history of protection forestry in New Zealand.

The second was an account of sand forests in New Zealand and this looks at the history of stabilisation and afforestation of coastal sand dunes in New Zealand. Nobody other than Professor McKelvey could have written these books with such authority based on personal experience. Peter has maintained an active interest in forest history and several of his later publications are in this area.

The list of services rendered and important posts held by Peter McKelvey over his illustrious career are too exhaustive to mention in any detail. He was President of the New Zealand Institute of Foresters from 1974 to 1975 and a Director of the Queen Elizabeth 2 National Trust from 1977 to 1987. In 1998 he was awarded the Institute of Forestry Thomas Kirk Award for academic excellence. He has published nearly 50 articles. He is held in enormous respect by the forestry profession in New Zealand as well as internationally. He established the New Zealand School of Forestry at the University of Canterbury and senior forest management in New Zealand is dominated by graduates who came under his influence. These graduates appreciate and acknowledge the important role that Peter McKelvey had in the shaping of forestry in New Zealand.

Chancellor, I have the honour to present Peter John McKelvey for the award of the degree of Doctor of Science, *honoris causa*.

#### **Address by Professor Peter McKelvey**

Chancellor, Vice-chancellor, Registrar, Professor Sands, academic colleagues, graduates – and my congratulations to you this happy day – ladies and gentlemen, I am grateful for this marvellous compliment. I thank the University.

It is thirty four years ago since the School of Forestry opened for business at Canterbury in 1970, with a new building, six academic and five technical staff and a secretary. Twenty students walked in the door as the first intake into professional classes. Truly, in 1970 there were guinea pigs on both sides of the lecterns.

The new department was made most welcome at Canterbury. There was tremendous support from the University and the then vice-chancellor Professor Neville Phillips. The University did things properly. It gave me the opportunity to travel widely overseas in 1967/68 to study forestry education, forestry research and forest industry so that we might formulate at Canterbury the most modern and relevant curriculum.

My travels lasted 9 months and covered Australia, North America, the United Kingdom, Switzerland, Germany, Sweden and Japan. Knowing how these countries were handling their forestry education, and also their forestry

problems, was invaluable. When we did formulate our curriculum we had confidence in it.

We benefited too from cooperation from Lincoln College, as it was then, with their Soil Science Course which they provided for foresters and other students on the Canterbury campus.

Competence in the field is important in forestry as it is in other technologies, so we placed a lot of emphasis on robust practical courses. The first was in the beech forests at Lake Sumner. I recall it started with instruction in river crossing using poles and ropes, which was hilarious. Later we changed the venues to Reefton and Harihari.

The practical courses were valuable too in that we found students really got to know each other in the field, and of course in the pubs at Reefton and Harihari too. They got to know the staff as well. As a result the classes became more unified which soon became obvious and positive for teaching.

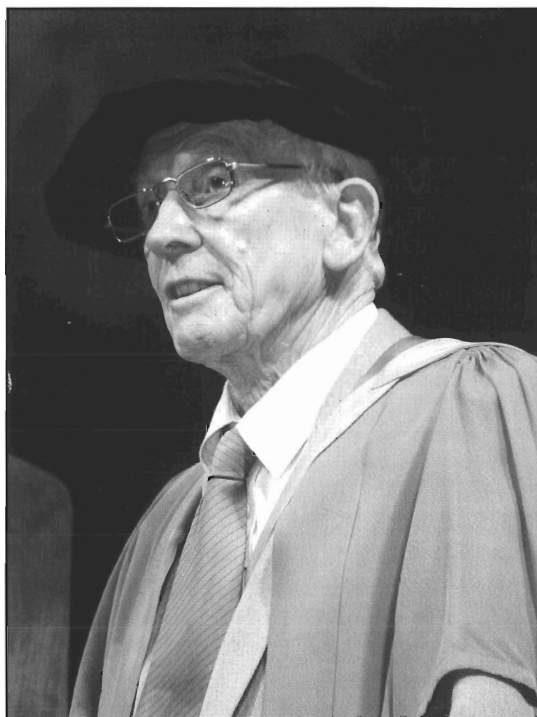
This familiarisation and unity had other advantages too. On the first practical course in the large pine forests of the central North Island the forestry students, reinforced with two staff, beat the crack Kaingaroa Forest Service team and the Kinleith NZ Forest Products Ltd. team at rugby. They were both waiting for us the next year. Unity was really needed then.

I am sure many of the graduates here have enjoyed the benefits of getting to know their classmates well. I predict from my own experience, which goes back to the 1950s, that many of you will remember your classmates for the rest of your lives, and later will probably travel long distances to attend class reunions.

Post-graduate studies began in 1972. Undergraduate classes expanded. We were delighted to enrol numbers of women students. We attracted a steady stream of students from overseas; in my time from fourteen countries. Before too long the staff were being invited to class reunions.

The School continues to progress with staff far more able than me. It is good to watch this from the sidelines.

I have been a forester all my working life and I



*Peter McKelvey giving his address to forestry and engineering graduates at the University of Canterbury graduation ceremony on 8 April, 2004.*

still regard forestry as a prince among the professions with its work environment both indoors and outdoors, its challenges for both intellectual and physical effort, and its mix of commercial and environmental objectives. There is a marvellous balance for me in forestry.

Most of you have chosen, or will choose, other professions which are more aligned to your own interests and objectives. They are your princes among professions. The feature is that most of you have chosen or will choose a profession as a way of life.

That great cynic George Bernard Shaw dismissed all professions as conspiracies against the laity. I have found he was certainly wrong about the forestry and related professions. Rather I have found that they represent services for the laity. Service

is the essence. I am glad that I worked for much of my career for the old Forest Service, which did so much for many communities.

My own experience has shown me that the greatest professional satisfaction comes from service: service to the community, service to your employer, service to your clients, service to your students, service to your colleagues, service to your profession itself. There can be many forms of service. They often involve going that extra mile.

It is my impression that wise people have been telling us much the same thing about the personal rewards from service for centuries. This emphasis on service for personal satisfaction rings true for me. Perhaps it will for you too.

You have graduated today and become qualified to pursue the profession of your choice. With your energy and your inherent creativity, plus your training, you can make a tremendous contribution to your particular profession. In doing so you can be of great service to New Zealand society and perhaps other societies too. Grab the opportunity and go for it. Remember too that work should contain an element of fun. I envy you and the tremendously rewarding times you have ahead of you.

And of course the great benefit for all of us is that while we train hard to master the basics of our professions, we can become educated.