



National Parks Association  
of Queensland Inc.

# 2021 19<sup>th</sup> ROMEO LAHEY MEMORIAL LECTURE

Steve Noakes  
NPAQ Councillor  
Chairperson, Binna Burra Lodge



## **19<sup>th</sup> Romeo Lahey Memorial Lecture 2021.**

### **Issues for QLD's national parks from 1930 to the Black Summer Bushfires 2019/2020.**

Steve Noakes

NPAQ Councillor; Chairperson Binna Burra Lodge

23rd October 2021, Kedron Room, City Hall – Brisbane

*The National Parks Association of Queensland (NPAQ) acknowledges and pays respect to the past, present and future Traditional Custodians and Elders of Queensland and the continuation of cultural, spiritual and educational practices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.*

This 2021 Romeo Lahey Memorial Lecture is the 19th such presentation of a tradition that commenced over a half century ago - in 1969 - to honour the memory of Romeo Watkins Lahey who served as founding President of NPAQ for three decades, from 1930 to 1961. For almost six decades up to the 1970s he was instrumental in convincing successive Queensland Governments to declare many of the state's national parks. In the early 1930s, along with Arthur Groom who was the inaugural Secretary of NPAQ, Romeo was also co-founder of Binna Burra Lodge, located within the world heritage listed Lamington National Park.

I'll comment on the history, linkages and activities of these separate organisations that are related in terms of their historical origins today in my presentation which will be in three parts:

1. Some history and context about Romeo Lahey
2. The past half-century of expert speakers who have delivered the Romeo Lahey Memorial Lecture
3. The Black Summer bushfires of 2019/2020 and the Romeo Lahey legacy in the form of Binna Burra Lodge.

In our audience today will be NPAQ members who personally knew Romeo Lahey (1887-1968) and who no doubt could share wonderful memories of his remarkable life as a conservationist, engineer, timber merchant and veteran of two world wars.

NPAQ also extends a warm welcome to the families of descendants of Romeo Lahey with us here today.

The Laheys are of Irish ancestry. On the informative 'Cultural Atlas' produced by SBS TV website here in Australia, it notes:

*'Within Ireland, social hierarchies are widely disfavoured. There is an emphasis on egalitarianism and mateship. A person's level of education and wealth does not necessarily earn them status or respect. Instead, the Irish tend to emphasise one's efforts and hard work.'*

Tenacity is another Irish culture characteristic that is widely reported.

A biography on Romeo held by the Australian National University notes:

*'Small but dynamic, modest but self-assured, quiet but tenacious, Lahey was in Arthur Groom's words 'a thorny problem to many who have not seen eye to eye with him'.*

I am of a generation that never met Romeo. So, to some extent, I do feel a bit of an imposter speaking about and paying tribute to someone I have only read about and heard stories about from past generations.

Nevertheless, for my generation, and those to follow, we have the good fortune as beneficiaries of Romeo's vision and passion for Queensland's protected areas. Additionally, in the case of the many thousands of people who felt an emotional impact of the 2019 bushfire devastation, we can be thankful for the vision of Romeo and others that a lodge on the Binna Burra Cultural Landscape in what is now a World Heritage Listed Lamington National Park came into existence and its ongoing disaster recovery process draws upon the legacy, resilience, and inspiration of its founders.

There will also be participants here today who will be increasing their knowledge about Romeo - who apart from his lengthy activities with NPAQ - was an accomplished engineer, businessman, timber merchant, Veteran of WW1 and WW2, founder of the 'Save the Trees' campaign in 1946, advocate for the conservation of the Windsor Tableland and surrounding rainforest area now contained as part of the Wet Tropics World Heritage area of tropical north Queensland including the Daintree Rainforest and Mount Lewis National Park.

#### **Our venue today:**

Let me make a comment about the historical context of why our venue was selected for this 19<sup>th</sup> Romeo Lahey Memorial Lecture.

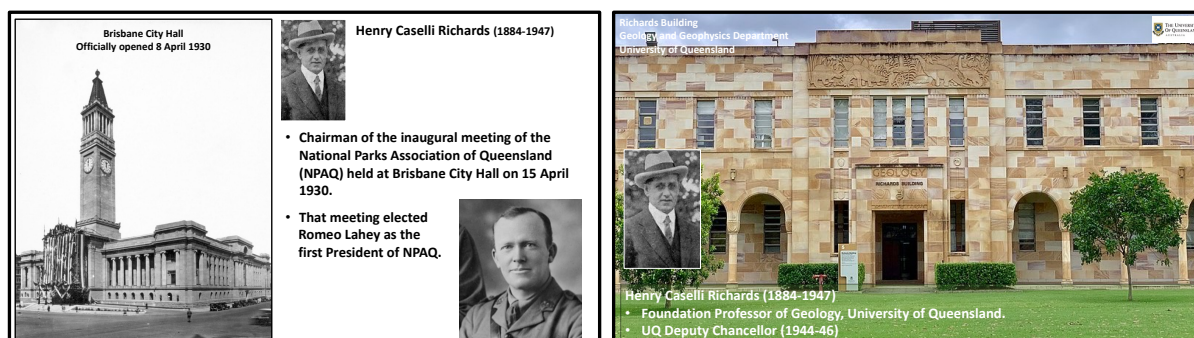
The European settlement of Queensland started with a penal colony in Redcliffe in 1824. Due to the scarcity of food and water, about one year later, the site for the penal encampment was moved along the Brisbane River to where the Brisbane CBD now exists. Over 100 years later, on 8 April 1930, this Brisbane City Hall was officially opened by then Governor Sir John Goodwin. One week later, Governor Goodwin returned to this building along with almost 100 people to attend the inaugural meeting of the National Parks Association of Queensland - held in the Lord Mayor's Reception Room - on 15th April, 1930.

In the 7<sup>th</sup> Romeo Lahey Memorial lecture given by Mr J.K. Jarrott, the Honorary Secretary of NPAQ in 1980, he recalled a 1930 dairy note by Romeo Lahey ...

*'... that the Association was launched at the City Hall with dinner suits worn by those on the platform.'*

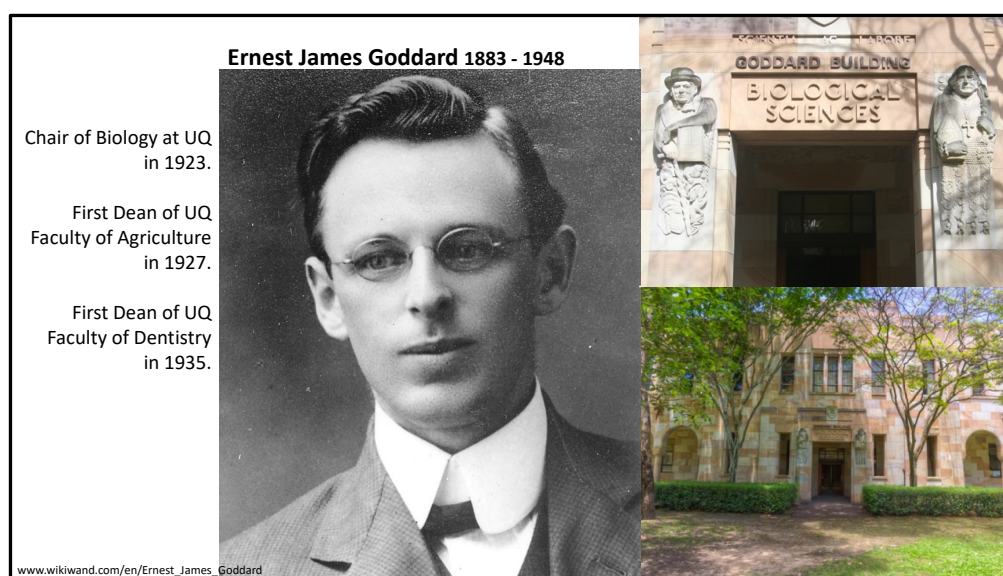
Today, a similar number of people - with more casual attire - who have crossed over into this new millennium have come together in the same building for another significant NPAQ event.

In recognition of the historical link, this year the Romeo Lahey Memorial Lecture is being held in the Kedron Room, a space that has had a rich and varied history showcasing 1920s heritage features with a view over King George Square.<sup>1</sup>



The April 1930 meeting to consider the formation of NPAQ was chaired by Henry Richards (1884-1947), Foundation Professor of Geology, University of Queensland and UQ Deputy Chancellor (1944-46). He served two terms as President of the Royal Society of Queensland and in the 1920's played an important role to bring scientific research to the Great Barrier Reef. He was also one of the many professional leaders and early conservation leaders who became an original shareholder of Queensland Holiday Resorts (Binna Burra Lodge).


Another of those was Professor Ernest Goddard (Professor Biology at The University of Queensland from 1923 to 1948) who was elected as one of the inaugural Vice Presidents of the NPAQ, along with the Archbishop of Brisbane, James Duhig.



<sup>1</sup> [www.museumofbrisbane.com.au/visit-us/about-city-hall/](http://www.museumofbrisbane.com.au/visit-us/about-city-hall/)


Professors Richards and Goddard were among those who started a long history of connection between Binna Burra Lodge and Universities. Henry Richards attended the first 'test camp' in June 1933 and again over the 1933-34 Christmas period to arouse enough interest and finance in order to establish a company that was to purchase land from George Rankin, a First World War veteran and local dairy farmer, in order to establish a lodge on Mount Roberts and give the public access and facilities to enjoy and appreciate the Lamington National Park.

**Henry Caselli Richards (1884-1947)**



**One of the original shareholders of Queensland Holiday Resorts (Binna Burra Lodge)**

**Attended the camps at Binna Burra in June 1933 and over the 1933-34 Christmas period**



The first summer/Xmas camp at Binna Burra. December 1933.

Referring back to that first NPAQ meeting in 1930, Romeo Lahey was elected President and Arthur Groom the Secretary.

Since then fifteen (15) people have been added to the honour board of Presidential leadership of the NPAQ with Brian Egan serving two terms, in 1980 – 1983 and again from 1986 – 1990. Today we acknowledge Susanne Cooper as the 16 th term of President of NPAQ and the second woman to hold the position. Having been an NPAQ Councillor for past three years, and an active member of the Advocacy Committee, Susanne took over from Graeme Bartrim as NPQA President at the end of last year.

Her professional experience with natural resources and environmental planning has been invaluable to her volunteer work and leadership of the NPAQ. Like Graeme and the many other leaders of the NPAQ before both of them, Susanne continues the Romeo Lahey legacy of connection with nature and a deep commitment for protecting our natural environment and the unique biodiversity it supports.

#### Presidents of NPAQ

1. 1930 – 1961 Romeo Lahey
2. 1961 – 1967 Edgar Kemp
3. 1967 – 1970 Lionel Simpson
4. 1970 – 1977 Clif Bell
5. 1977 – 1980 G. Horwood Cossins
6. 1980 – 1983 Brian Egan
7. 1983 – 1986 George Haddock
8. 1986 – 1990 Brian Egan
9. 1990 – 1996 Norm Traves
10. 1996 – 2001 John de Horne
11. 2001 – 2005 Rob Hitchcock
12. 2005 – 2008 John Bristow
13. 2008 – 2013 Tony O'Brien
14. 2013 – 2017 Michelle Prior
15. 2017 – 2020 Graeme Bartrim
16. 2020 - Susanne Cooper



**National Parks Association  
of Queensland Inc.**

NPAQ is a member of the  
**National Parks Australia Council.**  
Mission: To protect, promote and extend  
national parks systems within Australia.  
Formed in 1975.



Romeo Lahey had continued the work of Robert Martin Collins (1843- 1913) from Tamrookum in what Arthur Groom would, in later years, first describe as the 'Scenic Rim' – a destination brand that has received a boost in awareness over the past few years not only because of the Black Summer bushfires, but also for the increasing interest in outdoor recreation and adventure activities and 'farm-to-table' fresh food options.

Along with his brothers, Collins had established vast pastoral interests in Queensland and the Northern Territory. He served as a Queensland parliamentarian and in 1896 as President of the Royal Geographical Society of Australia (Queensland). Robert Collins has often been described as the father of the National Park movement. He had campaigned for some three decades to preserve the resource-rich, mountainous land he termed the 'South-Eastern Highlands of Queensland' – including the McPherson Ranges - as a national park. In the late 1890's Collins had taken the then Governor of Queensland, Lord Lamington, to the southern portion of the area which subsequently became known as the Lamington Plateau. Some two years before Lamington National Park was gazetted in the 30<sup>th</sup> July 1915 in honour of Lord Lamington, Robert Collins passed away on 13<sup>th</sup> August 1913. Just after the Lamington National Park was officially gazetted the Anglican Archbishop of Brisbane dedicated the All Saints Memorial Church at Tamrookum in memory of Robert Collins on the 31<sup>st</sup> August 1915. This event was attended by members of the Lahey family (Archie and Queenie Lahey). Since 1992, the site has been included on the Queensland Heritage Register as a rare example of a privately owned chapel and as a place with a special association to a person of significance in Queensland's history. When Harry Perry wrote the book 'Pioneering. The life of Hon. R.M. Collins, M.L.C.' in 1923, he wrote:

*'The credit of having brought about the proclamation of the area as a National Park has been allotted in more than one quarter, but it belongs, without doubt, to Robert Martin Collins.'*

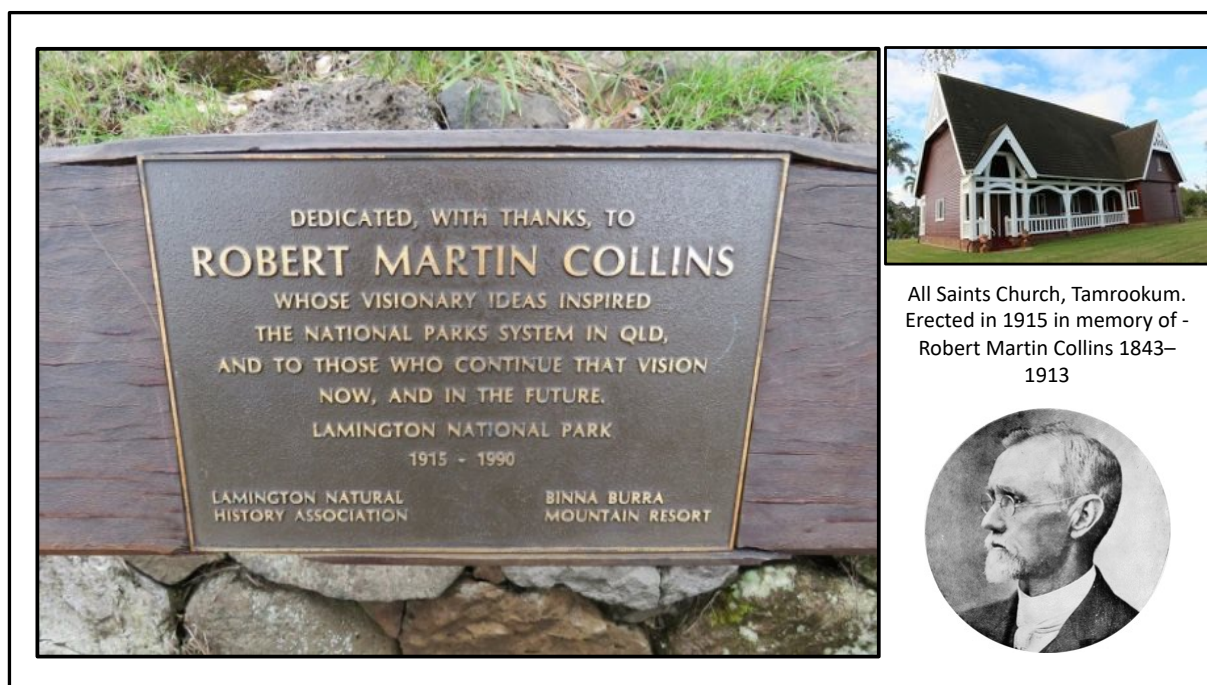
I refer to Robert Martin Collins today not just because of his important place in the history of bringing the idea of national parks into Queensland, but also because of the many linkages between Collins



and Romeo Lahey and the Lahey timber business interests. As an example, the All Saints Memorial Church at Tamrookum was built from timber gathered from the original Collins Tamrookum estate. The red cedar, blue and spotted gum, silky oak, iron bark and scrub bean timber being used for the structure and roof was trucked to Lahey's sawmill in Beaudesert and then the sawn timber was carted back to the building location.

(As a side issue - in 2022 I will propose to the NPAQ that we approach the Trustees of the All Saints Memorial Church at Tamrookum with a view to placing a suitable memorial plaque in the church yard to acknowledge NPAQ's appreciation of the pioneering efforts undertaken by Robert Collins to create national parks in Queensland.)

But another reason for my brief background on Robert Collins today is to remember that the advocacy baton to gazette the Lamington National Park was handed over to the then young Romeo Lahey.



**Romeo Watkins Lahey** was born in Pimpama in 1887, attended Brisbane Grammar School from 1901 to 1903 and worked as a clerk with the Australian Mutual Provident Society in Brisbane before completing his Engineering degree at the University of Sydney in 1914.

It was a few days before 19,000 hectares of the new Lamington National Park was gazetted, that Romeo enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force, 11th Field Company on 26 July, 1915.

Before he went off to the Great War in Europe, in October 1915 Romeo delivered a lecture to the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia Queensland Branch titled '*Some reasons why national parks should be established in Queensland, with special reference to Lamington National Park*'. In that

address he not only called for other large areas of Queensland to be reserved as national parks but also called for an extension of the state forest system.<sup>2</sup>

105 years later this remains a similar message from today's NPAQ!

After service in WW1, and while waiting to be repatriated, the then Lt. Lahey attended a town planning course at the University of London's School of Architecture. There he won the prestigious Lever Prize for his redesign of a war damaged approach road from Charing Cross to Euston station. Grateful for the role the ANZACs had played, Romeo took advantage of a French Government rail pass to study the construction of bridges, monuments, avenues of honour and other aspects of architecture in France.<sup>3</sup> He departed post war Europe on 31 May 1919 for the return ship journey back to Australia with his army appointment terminated in Brisbane on 28 August 1919. In this same year, Romeo became a foundation member of the newly formed Institution of Engineers Australia. Earlier in 1919, cases of Spanish flu pandemic began to appear in Australia and about 40 per cent of the population fell ill and around 15,000 died as the virus spread through Australia.<sup>4</sup> There is a link between the spanish flu pandemic, Romeo Lahey and Binna Burra Lodge which I will explain later in this paper.

To top off his academic studies, Romeo completed a Master's degree in Engineering from the University of Sydney, graduating in 1921. His thesis was titled: *'The survey, design and layout of a model suburb on modern town planning lines.'* The site chosen was the Fig Tree Pocket suburb of Brisbane. I am sure Romeo would have been pleased in 1927 to see the opening of the Lone Pine Koala Sanctuary at Fig Tree Pocket, now the oldest and largest koala sanctuary in the world.

Another legacy of Romeo's academic qualifications is evident in the roads constructed from Canungra to O'Reilly's Plateau and from Canungra to Beechmont, as well as the single access road into Binna Burra and the walking tracks within the Lamington National Park.

It was in 1920 that Romeo Lahey first tried to purchase the land at Mt Roberts, where Binna Burra Lodge was located for 86 years before the 2019 bushfires. With a life that also spanned 86 years, Romeo's niece, Shirley Lahey (1925 – 2011) In her 2003 book titled 'The Laheys. Pioneer Settlers and Sawmillers', includes writings from Romeo.

Romeo wrote:

*'Naturally interested in seeing that the returned soldiers had some useful work to do, so I put three men on to open up the National Park by clearing the old Cedar track. This was the road by which the timber getters went up the Coomera River for cedar about 1880. They went five miles through the rainforest with a bullock wagon until they were stopped by a waterfall below what is now 'Binna Burra'. When the soldiers got to the end of the track they turned up the*

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<sup>2</sup> <https://parks.des.qld.gov.au/parks/lamington/about/centenary>

<sup>3</sup> Lahey, S. (2003) The Laheys. Pioneer Settlers and Sawmillers. Page 296

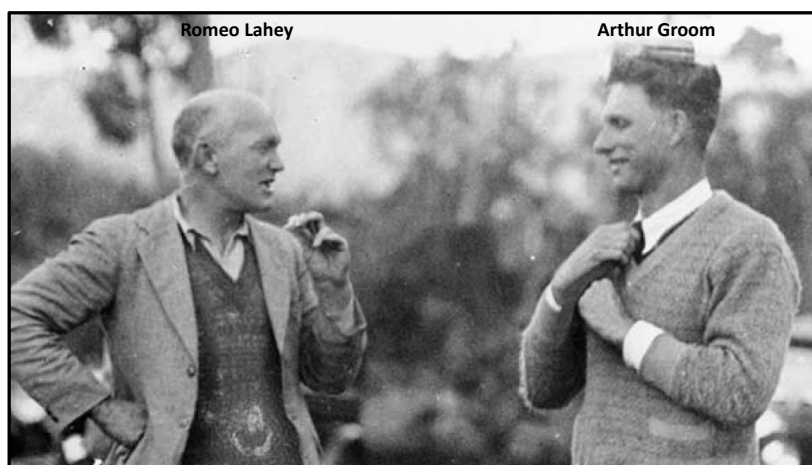
<sup>4</sup> [www.nma.gov.au/defining-moments/resources/influenza-pandemic](http://www.nma.gov.au/defining-moments/resources/influenza-pandemic)



*Darlington Range about half way up, and by that time they stopped as they had permanent jobs.*

*Looking back from the end of the track I saw Binna Burra from a new angle across the valley of the Coomera. I had seen it from Beechmont at Cowlings (farm) on a previous visit on Council business, but I did not appreciate its significance. It was on high knobs on the border of Lamington National Park, and it commanded a striking view. Before I went back to Canungra I scrambled up the range on the opposite side of the valley and had a good look around. It inspired me, so I decided to hold it for a Company to be formed. I knew that if I went to the owner he would say 'Let us put the price for a Lahey' so I went along to Arthur Finch to ask him to get in touch with George Rankin about the sale. But it was no go. Rankin wanted it for himself.'*

Within a decade, Romeo met a young journalist, photographer and avid bushwalker named Arthur Groom who had a brief period as Company Secretary of O'Reilly's Guesthouse business to the western side of the Lamington National Park. They became key players in the formation in 1930 of this National Parks Association of Queensland, and wanted to provide access and amenities adjacent to National Parks so the general public, irrespective of their social or economic position could experience Queensland's natural locations.



In his 1949 book 'One Mountain After Another' Arthur Groom recounts his extensive bushwalking around Lamington National Park area in the late 1920s and also observing the potential Mt Roberts on the land owned by George Rankin for a future guest house.

Shirley Lahey recounted in her 1999 talk to the Lamington Natural History Association she titled: 'A pioneer conservationist':

*'In October 1932 Romeo's diary mentioned taking (Arthur) Groom to a site for a boarding-house on Mount Cainbale. The following month his diary recorded that the two men walked from Illimbah up through Cowlings (farm) to Rankin's block, today's Binna Burra, where they camped. The following day they walked out to the border, back to Rankin's, down the Coomera and along the cedar track back to RWL's car at Illumbah.'*

Arthur Groom writes that:

*'Romeo had doubts. He had wanted Mount Roberts included in Lamington National Park Reservation and had described its cleared and grassed summit above the northern cliff base as 'a bald-headed man looking over a wall.'*<sup>5</sup>

Romeo and Arthur Groom returned to see George Rankin in December 1932 and subsequently were able to receive a letter from George that he would offer just under 170 acres for purchase at 20 pound per acre.

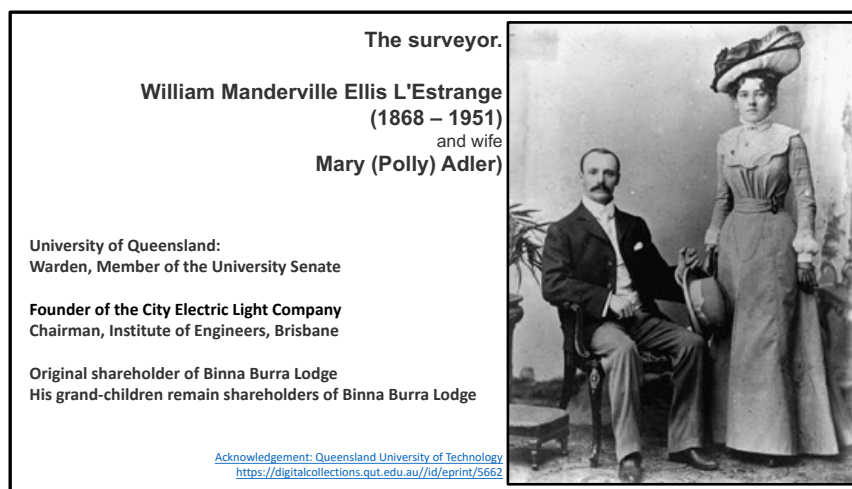
Romeo later wrote:

*'It was at the time of the depression ... but in case some (else) should buy it, it was worth risking one pound for the option.'*

Shirley Lahey also writes:

*'Shortly afterwards a friend of the Laheys, surveyor W.M. L'Estrange,<sup>6</sup> suggested the name of Binna Burra. Thanks to the generosity of Mr Rankin the period for paying off this land was extended and it was August 1946 before the land was paid off.'*

*Romeo's dairy records that within days of securing the option he was typing the prospectus for a limited liability company called Queensland Holiday Resorts Limited. To interest potential shareholders, Lahey and Groom began taking parties camping on the property. Many campers were NPAQ members and it was mainly through this core of supporters becoming shareholders that money was raised for a lodge.*



<sup>5</sup> Groom, A. (1949) Page 124

<sup>6</sup> William Manderville Ellis L'Estrange (1868–1951) is another of the leading people of Queensland who became initial shareholders of Queensland Holiday Resorts (Binna Burra Lodge). His grand children (John L'Estrange and Sally L'Estrange) retain the family shares in Binna Burra Lodge Ltd.

More at: <https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/lestrange-william-manderville-ellis-10817>

The main objective of the company was '*... to provide tourist facilities and as far as possible to assist in preserving tourist facilities and accommodation in beauty spots throughout the State of Queensland and as far as possible to assist in preserving such in their natural state for future generations in accordance with the ideals of the National Parks Association of Queensland.*'

Romeo's son, David Lahey, who gave the 4<sup>th</sup> Romeo Lahey Memorial Lecture in 1973 reflected on the establishment of Binna Burra Lodge. He said it was ...

*'.. an extraordinary thing that a corporate body should state as its objectives those of a mere association' ... Binna Burra has never been an ordinary company, it has the status of a company but it is a fellowship of nature lovers.'*

### The Romeo Lahey Memorial Lectures

There have been 18 previous speakers of the NPAQ Romeo Lahey Memorial Lectures – and I am the 19<sup>th</sup> of the 'mostly old white males' to be invited to contribute. Hopefully we will see some broader diversity and inclusion over the next half century of these addresses which are important in documenting and reflecting on the history and contributions of NPAQ as a volunteer driven organisation as well as the contributions of many expert and passionate individuals who have shared their knowledge and experiences about the need for, and benefits of, our protected areas here in Queensland.

In the inaugural NPAQ Romeo Lahey Memorial Lecture held on the 14<sup>th</sup> November 1969, R. Allen Clelland (1905-1981) refers to the early days of NPAQ and noted:

- *In January 1931, Arthur Groom suggested that all members of the Committee should be appointed voluntary rangers – at that same meeting Stradbroke Island and Hinchinbrook Island were discussed as National Parks proposal*
- *On the 21<sup>st</sup> April 1932, the second Annual meeting was held and reference made to the gazettal of the new National Park south of Stanthorpe, making a total of 171,000 acres, and reference was also made to the probable reservation of an area in the Carnarvons.*

Having recently read through all 18 of the previous Romeo Lahey Memorial lectures, I can assure you there is far too much rich information and comments from so many learned people for me to do justice to this morning. For those interested, you can easily access each lecture on the NPAQ website. Therefore, I will roll through one slide on each of the previous speakers which will no doubt jog the memories of many here today.

[1969 – 1st Romeo Lahey Memorial Lecture \(R. Allen Clelland\)](#)

[1971 – 2nd Romeo Lahey Memorial Lecture: The Great National Parks Movement \(Alec H. Chisholm\)](#)

Fifty years ago, on 26 August 1971, Alec Chisholm who served as President of the Ornithologists Union commented that fifty members of the organisation had '*.. spent a bright*

*week at Binna Burra. As Chairman of that congress I recall that our guest speaker urged strongly that National Parks, while being studied, should be fully safeguarded and kept free of motor roads and hotels. That speaker was your founding President, Romeo Lahey.'*

[1972 – 3rd Romeo Lahey Memorial Lecture: Down the Years with National Parks in Queensland \(W. Wilkes\)](#)

[1973 – 4th Romeo Lahey Memorial Lecture: A National Park Manifesto for Queensland? \(David D. Lahey\)](#)

[1975 – 5th Romeo Lahey Memorial Lecture: History in Queensland National Parks \(J.K. Jarrott\)](#)

[1978 – 6th Romeo Lahey Memorial Lecture: In Wilderness is the Preservation of the World \(Raymond L. Specht\)](#)

[1980 – 7th Romeo Lahey Memorial Lecture: The First Fifty Years \(J.K. Jarrott\)](#)

[1984 – 8th Romeo Lahey Memorial Lecture: The Reservation of Rainforest in Queensland \(G.H. Cossins\)](#)

[1987 – 9th Romeo Lahey Memorial Lecture: The Conservation Movement and the Queensland National Parks and Wildlife Service \(Graham Saunders, Ross Hynes, and Don Marshall\)](#)

[1990 – 10th Romeo Lahey Memorial Lecture: The Next Sixty Years \(Tony Groom\)](#)

[1993 – 11th Romeo Lahey Memorial Lecture: National Parks, the Challenges, Past, Present and Future \(Hon Pat Comben\)](#)

[1998 – 12th Romeo Lahey Memorial Lecture: The Legacy of Voluntary Conservationists \(John Sinclair\)](#)

[2000 – 13th Romeo Lahey Memorial Lecture: Queensland's National Parks: An Investment in our Future \(Paul Sattler\)](#)

[2002 – 14th Romeo Lahey Memorial Lecture: Queensland's Forests and Public Perceptions – Two Decades of Change \(Aila Keto\)](#)

[2005 – 15th Romeo Lahey Memorial Lecture: National Parks – A Vital Concept on the Verge \(Hugh Lavery\)](#)

[2008 – 16th Romeo Lahey Memorial Lecture: Protected Areas in a Time of Change \(Penny Figgis\)](#)

[2009 – 17th Romeo Lahey Memorial Lecture: The Mismeasure of Conservation: How do we assess the real contribution of our decisions to the protection of nature? \(Bob Pressey\) excerpt](#)

[2017 – 18th Romeo Lahey Memorial Lecture: Making Conservation Relevant in a Crowded World \(Peter Cochrane\)](#)

**Black Summer bushfire 2019 - 2020**

The 2019–2020 ‘Black Summer’ bushfires across Australia impacted every State and Territory. The bushfires caused widespread destruction of unprecedented magnitude, duration and intensity.<sup>7</sup> Across Australia, higher than average temperatures and low moisture levels in bushfire fuels resulted from several years of drought. This enabled unprecedented areas of bushfires to burn across much of the continent, with intense bushfire weather conditions continuing through most of the fire season. In total, 33 lives were lost, more than 3,000 homes were destroyed, billions of our native wildlife were decimated, and over 20 million hectares of community and farming land and national parks were burnt.

In early September 2019 here in south-east Queensland, the fire danger was higher than anything previously experienced at that time of year. Rainfall from January to August 2019 had been very much below average or the driest on record, and mean maximum temperatures were very much warmer than average.

On Friday 6 September, strong west to north-westerly winds produced extreme to catastrophic bushfire conditions in much of southeast Queensland. That afternoon we undertook a voluntary evacuation of an almost 100% fully booked Binna Burra Lodge as well as day trippers visiting the Lamington National Park – getting everyone out a few hours before the single access road became impassable due to the strong winds bringing down trees and rocks across the road.

At this same time significant bushfires were burning in the Granite Belt – at Stanthorpe and Applethorpe as well as at Springbrook, Witheren, Numinbah Valley, Sarabah and Peregrine Springs on the Sunshine Coast. By the afternoon of Sunday 8 September - by the time the bushfires had destroyed eleven homes and the Lodge in the Beechmont/Binna Burra area - there were more than 60 fires burning across the state.

The Queensland bushfires continued with a lightning strike on 17 September starting a fire on North Stradbroke Island. In October severe bushfires continued in Thornton, Laidley, west Grandchester, Dalby, Mount Sylvia, Mount Morgan, Childers and Lower Beechmont. On 9 November 2019 a state of fire emergency had been declared in 42 of Queensland’s 77 local government areas.

Bushfires also started in the Ravensbourne area near Toowoomba burning over 20,000 ha of bush over several days and destroying four homes. In Central Queensland, fifteen homes were lost at Cobraball and more than 6,000 ha of bush and farmland was burned. On the Sunshine Coast, a bushfire at Cooroibah near Noosa caused the evacuation of 6,000 residents.

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<sup>7</sup> Lawrence D, Ridders W, Houghton S, Hunt A, Bartlett J, Lawn S, Van Hooff M (2021) After the Fires: The impacts of the 2019-20 black summer bushfires on the wellbeing of emergency services personnel. Perth: Graduate School of Education, The University of Western Australia.



In November, bushfires returned to Lower Beechmont and on 13 November, a water-bombing helicopter crashed while fighting a fire threatening the small community of Pechey near Toowoomba. Fortunately the pilot walked away with only minor injuries. In early December, a house fire in Bundamba spread to nearby bushland and on the following day and in worsening conditions, the fire threatened homes in the local community. Residents within a three-square-kilometre exclusion zone were ordered to evacuate and one home was destroyed. A week or so later, the communities on the Sunshine Coast around Peregrine Springs came under threat for the second time in a couple of months.

Up on the Binna Burra side of Lamington National Park, on Christmas Eve 2019, we received a rare light shower of rain, but it was not sufficient to extinguish the spot fires and smoke in the air we had for the previous five months. Then, on the 18<sup>th</sup> January 2000, I recorded a fire-breaking 200 ml of rain at my house near Binna Burra. For the first time in over half a year the air was clear of bushfire smoke and I felt comfortable that we had come to the end of our Black Summer experience at Lamington National Park.

Sadly, our friends down in the southern states continued to suffer from the impacts of major bushfires until March 2020. While damage was done to the landscape in the Queensland part of the Gondwanan World heritage sites – especially Lamington National Park, Border Ranges National Park and Mt Barney National Park - more than half of the 366,500 total hectares of the Gondwana World Heritage forests which largely are within NSW were destroyed or damaged.

On 28 May 2020, the Insurance Council of Australia advised there were 38,181 insurance claims from the bushfires in 2019–20 across NSW, Queensland, Victoria and South Australia with estimated losses of \$2.32 billion. Communities in NSW were the hardest hit, accounting for 81 per cent of these losses, or \$1.88 billion.<sup>8</sup>



<sup>8</sup> <https://knowledge.aidr.org.au/resources/black-summer-bushfires-nsw-2019-20/>

Let me now reflect on the end of another Lahey legacy.

At the inaugural NPAQ Romeo Lahey Memorial Lecture held in 1969, Mr R. Allen Clelland said:

*'Queensland Holiday Resorts was established on 3rd March 1934 by members of the National Parks Association for the sole purpose of giving the public access to that end of Lamington. It was not long after that Queensland Holiday Resorts became known as Binna Burra Lodge and its connection with NPAQ is reflected in the original objectives of the company which included reference to 'the ideals of the National Parks Association of Queensland'.*

The original lodge building at Binna Burra was Leighton House built in Canungra in 1902 and owned by the Lahey family. When the Spanish Flu reached Australia after the First World War, the house was used for patients who were impacted by the pandemic.

In 1934 it was transported piece by piece on horseback up the track to Mt Roberts and became the initial central building of Binna Burra Lodge. Over the years it was adapted to become the Binna Burra Lodge reception, lounge and small shop until it was burnt down in the bushfires on Sunday 8 September 2019.



In the early 1930's when leading NPAQ members became shareholders and Board members of the original unlisted public company, they wrote into the company's constitution that no individual shareholder could own more than 2.5 per cent of the shares.

For nine decades, Binna Burra Lodge has been an organisation of collective ownership that has benefitted from hundreds if not thousands of volunteers through groups like the Friends of Binna Burra and the Lamington Natural History Association. It exists because of shareholders who usually

acknowledge that individual wealth generated from their usually small ownership investment is not their primary motivation for being a member of the company.

Still today, of the more than 1,000 shareholders, over half have around 500 to 1000 shares nominally valued at \$1 and over 90% have 5,000 or less shares.

Most shareholders in Binna Burra have their own individual philosophical approaches to our connection to nature and personal well-being which they feel is rewarded when they have the Binna Burra Cultural Landscape as their access into the ancient forests of the Lamington National Park.

In an ABC News interview<sup>9</sup> in 2018 celebrating the 85<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Binna Burra Lodge, Arthur Groom's son, Richard, explained how ...

*'... guests in the early days had to walk a long way through heavy bushland to get there. Their luggage was transported up the hill on a zipline. We didn't have transport up the mountain until 1947'.*

He added:

*'Binna Burra has always been for all people and that his father and Mr Lahey were trying to build a socialist dream using capitalist means.'*

At the time of the 2019 bushfires, no individual of the then 800+ shareholders held more than one per cent of the shares. As part of the bushfire recovery process, this year the company has adopted a similar process as was undertaken in the early 1930s by Romeo Lahey, Arthur Groom and others and actively gone out to the public to invite new generations of shareholders to be part of this rather special social enterprise with a strong environmental focus.

The Board of Binna Burra Lodge has intentionally kept the entry level low, with any new shareholders required to buy a minimum of 500 shares valued at one dollar each. The 12 month Offer Information Statement for new shareholders is open until April 2022, and so far some 200 new people have joined the Binna Burra owners family which now numbers 1069 shareholders. Shareholders from before the bushfires, as well as new shareholders, have to date purchased approximately 850,000 new shares. In addition to over \$4 million the company has sourced since the bushfires in various disaster recovery and new product development grants – the share capital raised to date has enabled the much needed funds for essential working capital, and expanding the accommodation offering, conference and function facilities and upgrading of infrastructure.

Remaining true to the objectives of Binna Burra expressed back in the 1930's by the founders and members of NPAQ, the present day vision for the company is:

To be a meaningful connection between nature and heritage by:

1. Providing a gateway to the Lamington National Park.

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<sup>9</sup> [www.abc.net.au/news/2018-12-14/binna-burra-nature-resort-turns-85/10616736](http://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-12-14/binna-burra-nature-resort-turns-85/10616736)

2. Offering a range of sustainable accommodation, food and beverage, activities and experiences, education and research opportunities.
3. Nurturing, conserving and improving the heritage listed land and buildings of which we are custodians.
4. Re-building a Binna Burra at Mt Roberts.

Recently, Binna Burra Lodge was honoured as a Queensland finalist in the Resilient Australia Awards, noting our response and recovery process over the past two years ...

- ✓ In September 2019 the Black Summer bushfires devastated Binna Burra Lodge
- ✓ In September 2020, after one year of closure, the Binna Burra recommended welcoming visitors with its remaining physical assets
- ✓ In September 2021, for the first time in two years, the business traded with a modest monthly profit – a significant turning point for its future commercial viability

We have recovered the business. We're solvent and have shown that even with the extra pressure of the COVID-19 pandemic lock-downs and business uncertainties, Binna Burra Lodge Ltd can operate a profitable trading entity with the infrastructure that was retained and has been improved after the 2019 bushfires.

Now we focus on rebuilding a new lodge at Mt Roberts to do justice to the legacy of Romeo Lahey and all of his generation – and subsequent generations - of national park conservationists and advocates. And we'll balance that with the aspirations and needs of future generations of customers and custodians of the Binna Burra Cultural Landscape.

This time – unlike what the founders did back in the early 1930s – we will not need to bring building supplies up to Binna Burra on horse back over a rough track.

This time we have a \$35 million new three km of road access thanks to Federal and State Government post bushfire recovery funds to enable the public to again access the Binna Burra side of Lamington National Park.



This time we have a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) in place. As the current generation of custodians of the Binna Burra Cultural Landscape we acknowledge the contribution of Lamington National Park



to the wider pattern and evolution of Queensland's history and heritage which extends for tens of thousands of years before colonial settlement.

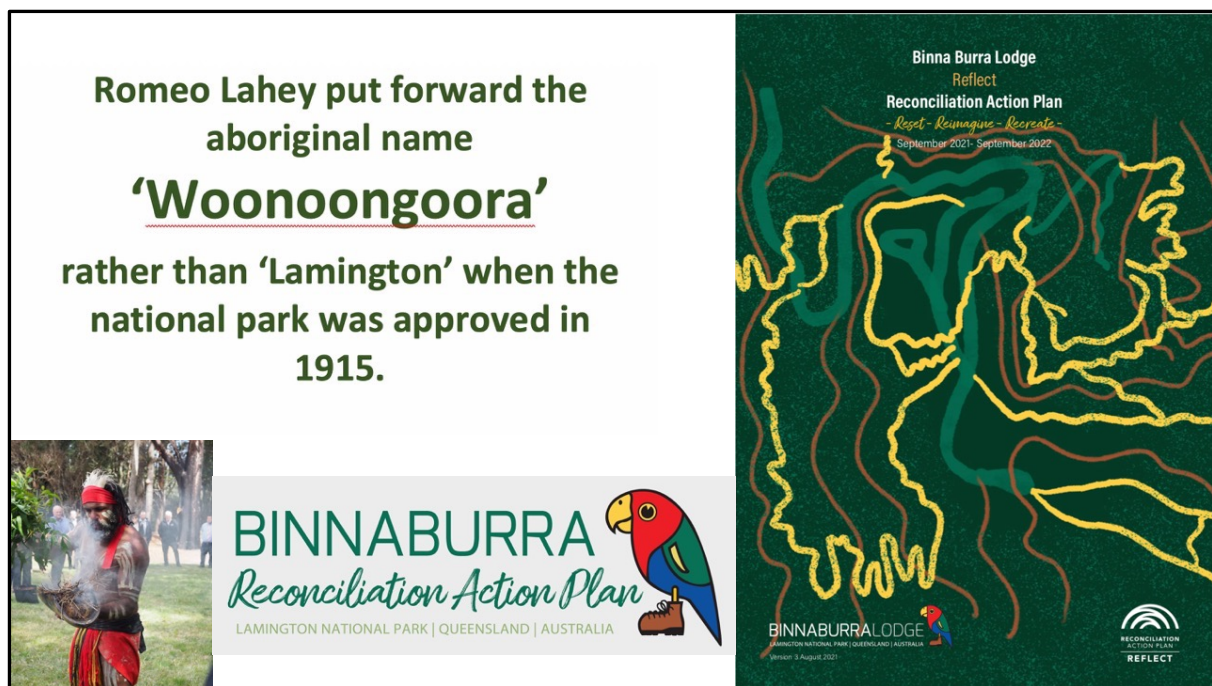
Within the Binna Burra RAP, we state:

*'We are committed to our RAP process being as radical as it needs to be, drawing inspiration from the environmental radicals who established Binna Burra Lodge in 1933. We do this while recognising the limitations of their radicality at that time.'*

Before 1915, Romeo Lahey was a strong advocate for using the traditional owners name of Woonoongorra for what became known as Lamington National Park and we have copies of his notes from the 1930's when he proposed each cabin at Binna Burra had an aboriginal name.

I am hopeful that Romeo Lahey would be pleased to read these words from our RAP:

*'We recognise the histories, stories and living knowledge of Aboriginal peoples and cultures of the Binna Burra surrounds should be a key component of the Binna Burra narrative.'*



## Conclusion

I am sure that the people of the generation represented by Romeo Lahey who formed the National Parks Association of Queensland at a meeting held in this building in 1930 would be comforted to see its evolution now as Queensland's oldest non-governmental environmental organisation.

In 2021 we can all celebrate the 91 years of advocacy for Queensland's protected areas by the NPAQ - driven by science, professional expertise, impartial scrutiny and trusted relationships.



Within two weeks time, the COP 26 UN Climate Change Conference will take place in the Glasgow, Scotland. It's a globally vital conference to increase climate ambition, build resilience and lower emissions.

With a warming and drying climate, there is increasing risk of future extreme fire seasons such as we experienced here in Australia during the Black Summer bushfires of 2019/2020. Good science tells us that carbon dioxide levels are now at their highest in human history. Protecting and expanding our natural ecosystems is an important way to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and slow down temperature rise in the short term by drawing down carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.

At the same time, we have to reduce global greenhouse gas emissions levels from fossil fuels – coal, oil and gas – and that brings with it a lot of complex issues to manage in an economy such as we have here in Queensland where the resources sector continues to make a major contribution to our overall economic and employment prospects, especially in regional Queensland outside this greater Brisbane urban bubble where we are today.

When Romeo Lahey and his colleagues founded the NPAQ they were able to harness access to and support from leading public figures in science, in business, in conservation, in the churches and in museums. Back then they were the leading advocates for the conservation of Queensland's natural places with a grass-roots approach to influencing the political powers of the day.

Nowadays, there are a number of politically-minded conservation groups in Queensland sometimes collaborating and sometimes competing to get their messages to influence the key policy makers within Government. So we need to ensure clarity in the role and position of the NPAQ as well as ensuring any proposals to the policy makers are based on good science.

Over the past year, NPAQ has been focussed on advocating for an increased percentage of our state to be in Protected Areas (PAs); National Park, Conservation Park, Special Wildlife Reserves. Currently, such areas are at just 8 percent of Queensland - the lowest of any state in Australia.

I'll finish my lecture with recent words from one of our current NPAQ Councillors and member of the NPAQ Advocacy Committee, Simon Cavendish.

*'... may I suggest a call-to-arms; i.e. NPAQ is reinventing itself to help protect Queensland's natural areas in 2020's as Romeo Lahey did in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.*

*We may not have the grass-roots approach of Romeo Lahey but we are developing the professional engagement skills with Queensland Government. If we can be seen by the Department of Environment and Science as an effective partner / player in delivery of Queensland's 10 year Protected Area Strategy, we should use such a lecture to say so (and thereby draw more support to sustain and improve what we do!).'*

Just like Romeo Lahey did for many decades, as a modern day NPAQ Councillor, Simon reflects the same spirit of volunteerism and commitment to the NPAQ Mission to promote the preservation,

expansion, good management and presentation of National Parks, and support nature conservation in Queensland.

There's a common phrase up at Lamington National Park called 'the spirit of Binna Burra'.

There's also a 'spirit of Romeo Lahey' across Queensland's national parks – and it stays strong in the two organisations he played such a vital role in founding.



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