

THE ORIGIN OF GREEN PANIC IN QUEENSLAND

by

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In investigating the origin of green panic (*Panicum maximum* var. *trichoglume*) in Queensland, a number of conflicting early records have been uncovered. Thus, the earliest herbarium specimen held by the Queensland State Herbarium was collected by F. F. Coleman in March 1932 and was taken from cultivated experimental grass plots at Lawnton. These introduction plots were jointly under the control of the Queensland Acclimatisation Society and the Queensland Department of Agriculture and Stock. The herbarium sheet notes that the source of the seed was A.C.F. Townsville. There are also subsequent collections of this same material as well as an analytical report by the Department's chemist.

It cannot be stated with certainty that A.C.F. is actually A.C.F. and Shirleys Fertilizers Limited, although this firm had their headquarters in Townsville in 1931 and they, in conjunction with another fertilizer company and the Australian Dairy Council, were responsible for financing the Queensland Pasture Improvement Committee. Mr. John Shearer and Mr. Harold Lever of the staff of A.C.F. and Shirleys were active in the field of pasture improvement at this time. The grass was collected near Townsville in 1933.

C. T. White (1938), late Government Botanist, and reputedly a meticulous recorder, stated "this particular variety was introduced by the Department of Agriculture and Stock some time ago and grown in experimental plots in different places in North Queensland and at Lawnton".

A herbarium specimen dated June 1932 is recorded as having been collected from Mr. A. A. Petrie's property "Madoora", Gayndah and furthermore that the specimen resulted from seed received by Mr. Petrie from New South Wales. However, a letter by Mr. F. E. Pope (1959) states:

An article ("Q.C.L." 19/2/59) on green panic grass states that green panic was recognized in the Gayndah district in 1936 and that it most certainly came from Africa. The late Mr. A. A. Petrie of Gayndah (who was a life-time friend of mine), wrote to me in 1932 and the following is an extract from his letter. I quote: "I am sending you a few roots of blue panic grass grown from seed I imported from India. I am sending you also one root of another grass which "came up" in the same plot as the blue panic. I have named it green panic and in my opinion it will be a better grass than the blue".

Blue panic (*Panicum antidotale*) was grown at the Queensland Agricultural College in 1928 and is recorded by a specimen sent for identification by J. R. A. McMillan. Dr. S. T. Blake has checked and noted that whilst green panic is not native to India it has been collected there so it could have been contained in a sample of blue panic seed from India. It is interesting to note that in advertisements for the sale of blue panic in 1933 Mr. Petrie writes of it as "this western indigenous grass".

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Marriott and Winchester (1951) referred to the fact that "green panic was pioneered by Mr. A. A. Petrie of "Madoora", Gayndah who over a period of some 15 years has established it on approximately 800 acres for grazing". Fox and Wilson (1959) referred to the recognition of green panic plants at "Madoora" in 1936 but it is quite clear that it was growing there as early as 1932 or earlier.

Whatever the origin of the plant in Australia, people are agreed that the late A. A. Petrie played the most significant role in popularising the use of green panic commercially and it is fitting that the official cultivar name be "Petrie". The actual origin of this botanical variety is Africa, but whence and how it came to Australia remains, to a degree, a mystery.

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