

The Crabtree Foundation (Australian Chapter)
2004 Annual Oration
Joseph Crabtree- A Product of the Little Ice Age

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Mr President, Elders and Scholars, I am delighted and honoured to have this opportunity to relate what I have learnt about aspects of the life of Joseph Crabtree to this distinguished gathering. I am in a position to speak authoritatively on the proposed topic, and correct some clear inaccuracies in the presentations of previous orators, because I have had the advantage of meeting with someone who actually knew the man and, of course, like almost every other person who met Crabtree, knew him intimately. Although I may be less than gracious towards several previous orators, I intend to be kind to the majority assembled here and, unlike a number of orators, be brief and pithy.

I am very nervous about revealing truths about Crabtree, however, as I am aware that reality is not a trait endeared by the Crabtree fraternity. I am also nervous because I am not used to speaking without visual aids that, in my case, are usually a bunch of overheads appropriately shuffled for each annual lecture. Just to feel secure and ensure that I keep on track, I have brought one overhead that provides the detailed structure of my talk. I find that notes are no substitute for visual aids especially with failing eyesight and an inability to cope with 'high tech' items like spectacles.

I first heard of Joseph Crabtree in 1976. Of course, at that time, the name meant nothing to me. I was too young and still in possession of too many faculties to have been invited to join the Crabtree Foundation. I had been asked to give a seminar in the Geography Department at the University of Bristol, just a spitting distance from Chipping Sodbury — at least for the locals, and stayed with an eccentric gentleman academic called Henry Osmaston. Henry appeared as though he had been a part of the university since its inception and, as it turned out, he had, in a fashion. He invited round a young biogeographer colleague for dinner who had similar interests to myself - in pollen analysis. His name was Keith Crabtree. It soon became clear that there was a long connection between these two people and the connection was, of course, Joseph Crabtree.

(At this point I tender information relating to publications of these gentlemen as evidence of the authenticity of my narrative, although scholars might may rightly be suspicious that it is unlikely that anyone associated with Joseph Crabtree could actually be academically productive.)

After dinner, we retired to a room that was lined with books possessing titles such as 'A technical manual on pulling it off', 'How to impersonate great leaders', 'The ABC of pizza making' and 'Sodbury tales' — but all hand written. Yes scholars — these were the elusive writings of Joseph Crabtree. As you will note from my Yahoo search, Henry

Osmaston has now retired to Thwaite End, Finsthwaite, Ulverston, Cumbria, where he appears to have become associated with Shop-fast-easy-books, a far cry from the Crabtree volumes. I sincerely hope that some scholar will, in the near future, attempt to tap the Crabtree treasure, that is surely there, but the road to Ulverston is fraught with hazards. I, myself, am embarrassed to admit that I failed in my attempt to reach Thwaite End last March because of the irresistible temptations of the public taverns along the way.

Back to Bristol. Henry Osmaston settled into his chair, surrounded by a strange assortment of ornaments that included a pickled testicle and no less than 16 wooden phalluses, and related a fascinating tale about his exploits in the highlands of tropical Africa as a glacial geomorphologist in the 1770s. In the splendid tradition of Oxford University, where he had gained his doctorate, Henry used the bulk of each semester to distance himself from education by mounting expeditions to Mt Kilimanjaro. Here he would survey the extent of the ice on the mountain. On returning to Bristol, he would analyse his results, eagerly awaited by the media, and, from calculated changes in ice limit, proclaim that either the ice was advancing and the world should prepare for another ice age, or that the ice was retreating and we should be concerned about global warming. Nothing has really changed to this day. From the payment received for his articles in the media, Henry would mount his next expedition.

On one occasion Henry became the victim of a sudden onset of global cooling and was quickly buried under several metres of snow. This was thought to be the end of Henry Osmaston. However, his body was exposed with the onset of sustained . Greenhouse warming in the 1950s and he had miraculously survived intact, apart from a few perforations courtesy of his tripod. Furthermore, his location on the mountain could be used as a valuable proxy for estimation of the extent of ice advance and retreat since the cessation of his biennial recordings. Henry was able to resume his lectureship at Bristol as no-one had bothered to terminate his position, a situation that would never eventuate at Monash where I think any absentee is declared dead after 3 hours. Consequently, with nearly 200 years of salary, Henry could afford to truly adopt the role of gentleman academic.

It was on en route to Africa one year when Henry met Joseph Crabtree. He recognized that there was more to Crabtree than a vendor of pizzas and potential president of the US, and persuaded him to join the current expedition. Crabtree was in his element: running around the ice with pole erect, surveying everything in sight. At the end of fieldwork, that had taken only a fraction of the time expected, Osmaston returned to Great Britain determined to include Crabtree as co-author on his next article 'A quickie on the ice' while a rejuvenated Crabtree retreated to the lowlands optimistic that his new gourmet delights, hand tossed pigmy pizza and Venda pasta, would fare much better than his Chipping pizzas did in China. (Incidentally, I discovered the settlement of Chipping by accident as I looked through the index of the Times Atlas attempting to locate the exact position of Chipping Sodbury. The need for a 'p' extended the time required for my search substantially).

Henry was back in Bristol when he read in the Chipping Sodbury Chronicle that its then favourite son had met with an unfortunate accident in South Africa (this was before the time of JK Rowling, the author of the Harry Potter Books, and Edward Jenner, the first doctor to successfully vaccinate against smallpox, but contemporary with John Stockwell, the lunatic from Pucklehrch). Apparently the pygmy pizzas had been selling like hot cakes: not for eating but for attracting game. They were equally as portable but far more effective than dung pats in luring a whole range of big game animals to within firing range, because of the state of sexual frenzy they generated. One day, while Crabtree was on safari demonstrating his unintentional invention, the pizza he was eating attracted the ardour of a passing large white rhino that began to charge Crabtree. The only comprehensible words he uttered as the massive horn penetrated his rectum with alarming velocity were interpreted as 'Jesus' and 'Hypothermia'. His lady companion, who refused to be named, was reported as being initially shocked and then excited at the spectacle.

Crabtree was hospitalized for many months, and for the first few weeks was unconscious. When he came round, he declared that it had been both the most painful and exhilarating interaction with another organism that he had ever experienced. This did not please his lady companion who had been constantly at his beside. On his next visit to Africa, Osmaston called in to see Crabtree, partly because he liked pizza, but mainly because, as a glacial geomorphologist, he had a special interest in crevasses.

There are certain aspects of this story that disturb me and I think closer examination is warranted to understand more about the nature and character of Joseph Crabtree. (I did go to Africa this January to help this understanding and to see if the natives still enjoyed pizzas, but failed to get further than the staff club at Cape Town University). . Critical to any understanding is Crabtree's reaction to the charging rhino. The most parsimonious interpretation is that he was attempting to flee the beast. But this seems inconsistent with the man of steel we know him to be. He was to become president of the United States of America, one of a group of fearless men who feel indestructible and, unfortunately, generally are. It is considered that the odd president may have been assassinated but the facts do not bear this out. For example, I have it on good authority that John Kennedy is alive and well. He has been gainfully employed for the last 30 years organizing Elvis Presley concerts. A second explanation is that Crabtree really wanted it. I cannot accept, though, that a person so intent on changing the world would be prepared to potentially sacrifice himself for instant, brutal sexual gratification, especially with a female within groping distance.

I am inclined to feel that he had some indisposition that prevented him taking more appropriate action. What did he mean by his utterance of the words 'Jesus' and 'Hypothermia'. 'Jesus' is unlikely to be significant as it is a word on the lips of the majority of people in time of pain, because of the memory of misspent and depressing youthful years enduring the constant brainwashing ceremonies demanded by sadistic parents and communities, or realization of the global conflict that has been generated in this name, or even the misplaced sympathy engendered by masochistic actions that culminated in gratifying crucifixion. The cry of 'hypothermia' by contrast, is much more

significant. Was Crabtree feeling similar physical pain or mental anguish he had experienced at the hands of the third daughter of the fourth Earl of Kerry, or was Lady Hypothermia actually his female companion and he was protecting her from the pleasure of penetration by the rhino horn? The latter explanation would be in keeping with the misguided gallantry of Crabtree. However, it is unlikely that Hypothermia was his mystery companion. In the first place we know that Crabtree had no fixed schedule, having been persuaded to temporarily suspend his central mission to help survey the Kilimanjaro ice sheet, and there would have had insufficient time to request Hypothermia to join him and for her to oblige. In the second place, she would not have obliged; she would have told him to piss off.

I believe that the answer lies in a misinterpretation of the uttered word. Hypothermia, as we are all aware, is a physiological term for the condition of having a body temperature below normal. It is the opposite of hyperthermia. However, there is a third term 'hypothermia' that relates to having a body temperature above normal in cold climates and a body temperature below normal in warm climates. The definition of this term was included in the second edition of the Oxford Dictionary, after the condition had been recognized, but then dropped in subsequent editions because no further cases had come to light. I suspect but cannot prove that Crabtree was the reason for both the adoption and abandonment of the term. The fact that Crabtree appears to have been physiologically unique may be the underlying single attribute that made him the inspiration of all impure thinkers since the middle part of the 20th century. I am surprised and a little dismayed that Elder McGrath had not made this discovery. After all, he likes nothing better than to be tucked up in bed with a good dictionary, in the absence of anything warmer.

The realization that Crabtree had hypothermia, would explain his inability to move in the face of the charging rhino - the temperature on the savanna was just too hot. Conversely, it explains why he was able to be so active on the Kilimanjaro ice. I venture to say that this condition can lead to new insights into the many faceted life of Joseph Crabtree and correction of inaccuracies in previous orations.

Let us take Hypothermia for instance. Why not? Everyone else seems to have taken her. There is no mention of the name in the Kerry family tree and the third daughter of the fourth Earl of Kerry appears to have been called Millicent. I suspect that when Crabtree gazed upon Millicent in the cold climate of Britain, her cleavage soured his blood temperature to almost uncontrollable levels and he could not help but utter the name of his affliction. As no one had heard of Hypothermia, he was assumed to be saying Hypothermia and, being in character, it became Millicent's nickname.

I have a number of issues with 'Joseph Crabtree and the sources of the Nile'. This oration encapsulated elements of a variety of Elder Williams tall tales that have enraptured audiences at scientific meetings around the world, and brought despair to his wife. The familiarity of its contents made me wonder whether, in fact, Williams was Crabtree re-incarnated. I failed to pose this question to him at the time of his oration out of respect for my then head of department and the fact that I was his guest. I know for certain that the Sudanese melon girl hailed from Inner Mongolia, as we both once held the same

attraction for her. I suspect that too many expeditions to both areas in the summer heat had taken some toll on his mental capacities and he now fails to distinguish a temperate from tropical desert. I suspect also that Crabtree's paranoia, loss of testicular symmetry (is there such a thing as testicular symmetry?) and apparent lack of achievements in the Sudan, can be put down to the weather. It is most likely that under the intense heat, some of Crabtree's extremities simply failed to function and dropped off. Although I hate to say this about reptiles and Scotsman, I think that both the snake and James Bruce of Kinnaird have been much maligned.

Elder Williams may have come closer to the truth had he actually communicated with fellow African researcher, Henry Osmaston. Unfortunately the colonial culture of dividing up Africa has continued into the post-colonial era for geomorphologists and archaeologists who are very possessive of their patches. There is intense competition and lack of information sharing between the English, French and Germans, just as there must have been between species of *Australopithecus* and *Homo* during the early stages of human evolution in Africa. Elder Williams, being multilingual as well as hyperthermic and possessing an Australopithecical gait, has been generally ostracized for wanting a bit in each camp.

The evidence is clear. Crabtree performed better in cold than warm climates and this can be explained by his unusual physiology. But is there more to it? I suggest there is, and the fact that the man erected so much higher than any of his contemporaries requires an extreme explanation. This cannot be found in social, historical or even gender theory: it has to relate to climatic determinism. Crabtree was a product of the Little Ice Age. Many a historian has scoffed at the notion of the existence of such an ice age and/or its significance, deliberately overlooking or discounting the influence of climate change on human affairs, a viewpoint sustained by the use of incorrect chronologies and lack of rigour in selection and application of historical material. Never trust qualitative information presented in paper or document form. Thanks to substantial monitoring studies by long-lived individuals like Henry Osmaston and well dated proxy records such as those provided by palynologists, there is now a general acceptance of a cold period in historical times, culminating between the mid-sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. Many of the coldest years occurred during the lifetime of Joseph Crabtree while his death corresponded in time, and perhaps not coincidentally, with what is regarded as a turning point in the climate of Europe. Perhaps the best way of demonstrating the existence, significance and consequence of this period to assembled members is to simply state that vineyards in Europe were forced to retreat 500 km south of their pre-existing position. Catastrophic!

Crabtree realized that the survival of society was in his hands, or rather in other parts of his anatomy. He alone had the energy and passion to procreate effectively under low temperatures. No wonder that he was incensed at the loss of half his ammunition. So many to do and so little time. And have some compassion for Hypothermia. Her apparent frigidity may have simply been a feature of the times.

And what about the future? Although the global climate is naturally in a warm phase,

there is no doubt that greenhouse gases are contributing to the temperature rise presently being experienced. There is concern about sea level rise and consequent drowning of islands and coastal cities, about increased climatic variability and the incidence of droughts and floods, about a possible close down of the oceanic thermohaline circulation system, about the increased incidence of new and recurrent infectious diseases, about disruption to agricultural systems, and about overpopulation - with a reduction in the significance of hypothermia. However, the greatest concern with global warming is that the world may never again experience the like of Joseph Crabtree.