

EVIDENCE OF PATRICK RILEY,¹ CARPENTER
JANUARY 1820

1. How long have you been in this settlement?

Four years.

2. During that time have you been employed as a carpenter and have you become acquainted with the various woods procured in the neighbourhood?

I have been employed as a carpenter, and have had a knowledge of all the woods procured here.

3. What are the woods chiefly used?

Cedar and rosewood, flooded gum, iron bark and spotted gum, pine, beefwood, honeysuckle red and white, tea tree are the principal woods that are used. Mangrove is likewise used for wheelwork, the felloes and stocks of wheels.²

4. Which of these woods do you think the most useful in house building?

Cedar for fittings, pine for floorings, gum tree for roofing and beefwood for shingles.

5. Do you consider that the wood of this settlement is superior in quality to that found near Sydney or in the District of Cumberland?

All the woods except the stringy bark are of better quality here than near Sydney. The rosewood I believe is nearly confined to this settlement.³

6. For what particular purposes is the rosewood adapted?

It is very good for fine furniture and for veneering, as well as for turning.⁴ Good bed posts are made of it.

7. Are any of the woods you have mentioned well adapted for agricultural implements and carts?

The flooded gum is well adapted for those purposes and comes nearer ash than anything else. The flooded gum that grows on rocky land is much the toughest and best adapted for making farming utensils. That which grows on lower land is liable to heart [decay] and is short grained.⁵

8. Have you observed that the trees in this part of the Colony are as rotten in the heart as those found to the southward?

A great proportion of the large timber here is rotten at the heart except iron bark. The large cedar trees, from three to five feet through, are generally rotten in the heart but those of two to two feet and a half in diameter are generally sound and the wood finer in the grain.⁶ In the large cedar trees also, a gum comes out in the working and leaves the wood porous.

9. Do you consider the cedar of this country as fine as the mahogany imported into England?

By no means. Our best cedar approaches near to the Honduras mahogany.

10. Do you find that the timber of this country shrinks very much?

Very much, but I believe it is owing to being cut at improper seasons and not going through the proper process of exposure to weather.

11. Would you expose it in log or in plank?

In plank.

12. What are the proper seasons for cutting wood in this Colony?

I think the months of May, June and July are the most proper as they are the winter months here.

13. Do you think that wood of this Colony is adapted for purposes of ship building?

It is very durable timber and I think it is adapted to building hulls of ships. The spars are likewise good but they are heavy.

14. Are they as strong as Baltic pine?

I consider that the spars made of the flooded gum are stronger than Baltic pine.

15. Is there a great quantity of the flooded gum in this settlement?

A great quantity on both sides of the river and of trees that are from 40 to 90 feet.⁷ They are very straight and there are few limbs upon them.

16. Have they been much used in vessels that have been built and repaired here?

Very much used.

17. What is the nature of the pine wood?

It is very brittle, though close grained, and is well adapted for floors. It should be sawn into plank or scantling or it is apt to rot.

18. Is it of use in ship building?

None. It is too soft and short grained.

19. Is there any wood in this colony equal to the English oak?

I consider the iron bark to be quite as lasting as oak but much heavier. In other respects I think it as good though more difficult to be worked. The blue gum also comes near the oak for its working and durability and is about as heavy as oak.⁸

20. Do you conceive that the timber that is cut in this settlement is allowed sufficient time to season before it is used?

It is not allowed sufficient time on account of the great consumption at headquarters.

(Signed) Patrick Riley.

REFERENCES

1. Bonwick transcripts, Box 5, pp. 2272-8.
Patrick or Johnson Riley, a carpenter of Dublin, was tried at Limerick in August 1812, and sentenced to transportation for life. He arrived in the Three Bees in 1814 and was subsequently sent to the penal settlement at Newcastle from which he escaped in 1816. He was captured and returned to complete his sentence, remaining in Newcastle until he received a conditional pardon in 1821. He may have been the Patrick Riley of Aberglasslyn, near West Maitland, who died at Richardsons Point, Meroo [Louisa Creek] on 22 July, 1858, aged seventy eight. (N.S.W. Colonial Secretary, Register of conditional pardons, vol.19, p.183; Campbell to Wallis, 31 December, 1816, N.S.W. Colonial Secretary, Records, Out-letters; Maitland mercury, 7 August, 1858.)

2. The following botanical names of the species referred to in Riley's evidence have been supplied by the Forestry Commission of N.S.W.

Cedar (Red)	<i>Cedrela toona</i> var. <i>Australis</i>
Rosewood	<i>Dysoxylum fraserianum</i>
Flooded gum	<i>Eucalyptus grandis</i>
Iron bark (Red)	<i>Eucalyptus sideroxylon</i>
Iron bark (Grey)	<i>Eucalyptus panniculata</i>
Spotted gum	<i>Eucalyptus maculata</i>
Pine (Brush Cypress)	<i>Callitris Macleayana</i>
Beefwood	<i>Stenocarpus salignus</i>
Honeysuckle (Red)	<i>Banksia serrata</i>
Honeysuckle (White)	<i>Banksia integrifolia</i>
Tea tree	<i>Melaleuca quinquenervia</i>
Mangrove	<i>Avicennia officinalis</i>
Stringy bark	<i>Eucalyptus scabra</i>
Blue gum	<i>Eucalyptus saligna</i>

3. Rosewood occurs in rain forests from the Hawkesbury River to the McPherson Ranges.
4. Rosewood is very rarely veneered now as it is generally considered to be too hard and is hard on knives. It was probably sliced in the early days.
5. Flooded gum is rare now in the Hunter, although it could have occurred widely in the alluvial soils, now mostly cleared. Riley appears to confuse flooded gum with blue gum, these species being very similar in appearance although the latter is much heavier. The real flooded gum would very rarely occur 'on rocky land'. He is probably referring to blue gum.
6. Cedar is usually cut now in the mountains and generally speaking carries little heart defect. Probably the cedar trees cut before 1820 were found on the river flats and because of faster growth, the wood was more defective.
7. Riley appears to be mistaken about the height of flooded gum: this species grows to 150 feet.
8. Blue gum is not regarded by modern foresters as being very durable especially in exposed situations.