

Raphael House

celebrating 25 years

1979 - 2004

CHRONICLE 6 - 30 APRIL 2004



Maori Day: Honouring the ancestors, the first people and the spirits of the land



Saturday 7 August (1982) saw a spring-like burst of stunning weather, to ensure the blessing of the school by Maui Pomare went well. With a warm sun lolling overhead the day was a joy-filled and heart-warming one.

The Trentham Army Camp Maori culture club had put up a marquee on the Friday afternoon and this meant the school could seat all our guests to lunch at one place. This was a great help and many thanks are due to the army and the group. By Saturday morning the preparations were all go, as busy helpers took up their tasks in catering headquarters in Gerald's classroom, by the hangi (positioned by the first bend of the road & covered by 830am) or decorating the school.

The numbers of visitors in the car-park started to look encouraging around 10am with Maui Pomare and Kohe Webster conferring about the ceremonials with the others in the visitors party. When the minute arrived and Raphael House was emptied of all living souls, our signal went up, and down the road came the visitors' column in hushed silence.

Across the front of their procession were Kohe Webster, master carver and kai-wero (challenger), Maui Pomare

holding a greenstone weapon and Harata Solomon, an elder of Ngati Toa. Their Maori dress and feather cloaks thrilled the eye and stilled the onlookers, as the visitors wheeled about to face the now-empty Raphael House (the building which is now the kindergarten).

Kohe Webster, of Ngati Toa and Ati-Hau, slipped off his feather cloak for Harata to hold, and moved across to challenge Maui, who stood on the lawn facing the front door. After moving through the challenge to Maui, he slapped his knee and hoisted the 'baskets of worries' which Maui had brought with him. This he did by using his shoulder as a fulcrum and levering the spear over his bare back - the tip entering the handle of his 'baskets'. With that the 'taiaha' flew into an upright position. The challenge was soon over and Kohe placed a sprig of mamaku fern onto the ground before the door. This indicated that Kohe had challenged the house as a place with a spirit of its own. It was up to Maui Pomare, whose tribe Te Atiawa have occupied the Tirohanga area since early last century, to take the sprig on behalf of the 'people of the land'.

Both men recited karakia or prayers to render the 'tapu' or sacredness of the land ordinary



and propitious, concluding with Our Father and a hymn 'Ma te Marie'.

The cry went up for all Raphael House haka group to zoom around to the back terrace as the focus for the proceedings shifted back from the ancestors to the visitors and hosts. The calls of welcome went up from the women of both groups as our action song of welcome pulsed out from the back verandah. The slow memorial tread of the advancing visitors pushed us inside, all scrambling to kick off gumboots. As our visitors came up to the doors the young men from Kohitere stamped out a song to haul their canoe right to the door, then leapt straight into the famous haka - Ka mate! Ka mate! - which had everyone all goosebumpy and feeling very honoured.

Everyone was soon seated, the visitors mostly in the upper room, with their speakers facing us on our level in the lower room. Our Maori grandfathers Bart Watere, Hone Paea, Tahi Asher and Iain Trousdell for the school, each gave a speech of welcome with appropriate waiata or ancient songs. Then, feeling especially proud of our paepae, our speakers, it was the visitors' turn. Generally they followed the same paths in farewelling the dead, recalling proverbs of old, greeting the elders and tribes present, and pouring praise on the school and its community. For the visitors Kohe Webster, Whatarangī Winiata, David Somerset and Gary Wehipeihana stood to 'mihi' or greet the school, and then it was the turn of Maui Pomare.

The gathering listened intently as Maui recalled the names of streams, springs and knolls, villages and people right down through the generations to the present. He gave the names of the hills that stand sentry over the school site, Pokai-mangumangu, and Puketirotiro, the broad back of

Tukutuku between the two streams Wairere and Tirohanga which run away from the school, the glades of Parepahi and the beautiful riverside village of the Ngati-Tama chief Te Kaeaea which was called Maraenuka.

Maui spoke of the members of his people with intimate connections with the woodlands of Wairere and Tirohanga who were not present at the day. The sacred spring of Te Puna, which still bubbles up some hundreds of yards from the school, provided a safe watering hole for Te Rauparaha during his campaign to take the Heretaunga or Hutt Valley early last (19th) century.

He held aloft a weapon made from a whale's rib, which was the weapon of Taringa Kuri, who lived on the river edge below Wairere or Belmont. A flintlock pistol was also held up to the gathering, the last surviving relic of the sale of Wellington to the New Zealand Company in 1841 by his ancestors.

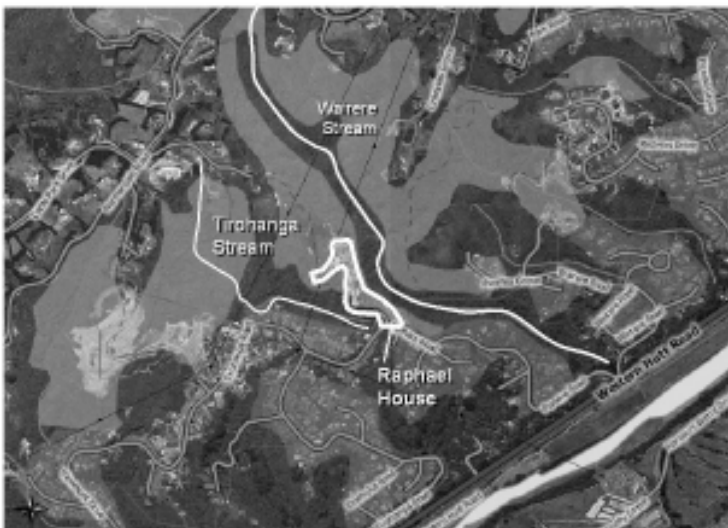
Every ridge and stream of our school area has deep associations for the Maori people and the Pomare family. Maui's grandfather, Sir Maui Pomare, lived in the family house at Pomare Road, and farmed these hills. It was Maui himself who as a youth made the cattle track which our children and teachers use to wander down to the stream known as Wairere.

The school owes a debt of thanks to Maui Pomare for this help and the generous gift of his knowledge of the history of the settlement of the area as the 'ahi-ka' of the tribe who are 'keepers of the fire'.

The speeches and songs over, the school lined up on one side for the hongī; everybody had to hongī everybody! Then a walk over the beautiful zig-zag path for some of us while the hangī was lifted. There was soon enough hot kai on the tables for the call to lunch to be sung to us in the old way.

That was the moment when the cooks and stewards could listen to the clinking of knives and forks, and enjoy the sure sensation the tummies were being filled. A good place to stop. Nga whakamoemiti ki te Atua nana nei i hapai to tatou moemoea. Thank you Father for blessing our efforts and bringing about our dream.

PHILIP WALKER.
AUGUST 1982.



'Every ridge and stream of our school area has deep associations for the Maori people'
Image supplied by Duane Wilkins