

Palmerston North and the Manawatu: A Historical Approach

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*Ko Tararua te Maunga,
Ko Manawatu te Awa,
Ko Rangitane te Iwi.*

*Tini whetu ki te rangi, Rangitane ki te
whenua.*

*Tararua is the Mountain
Manawatu is the River
Rangitane is the Tribe*

*As the multitude of stars are in the sky,
so are the people of Rangitane on the
land.*

The historical and cultural context of a community is basic to understanding the lives and lifestyles of the people, as well as to any principles of ecology that may apply. The various components of a community fit together, not in some neat package, and not even in a complex jigsaw puzzle, but in an amorphous and ever changing set of dynamic partial patterns that emerge and then fade or even disappear, but when the time is ripe, re-emerge and flower. Economic, political, educational, social, military, and other chunks link together, uneasily at times, to form substance upon and in which individuals and groups survive and occasionally thrive. This introduction to the early and recent history of the region is but a beginning of the groundwork, an essential part to the glimpses of understanding of the larger picture.

Concerning the history of the Manawatu region and Palmerston North, most readily available literature focuses on the history of Pakeha development, starting with the arrival of Europeans and their settlements in the middle of the nineteenth century. Many authors have avoided or left out the Maori perspective of this region. Some writers mention it only in a few introductory or cursory sentences. It is revealing and intriguing that the most noticeable books found on the history of Manawatu and Palmerston North were titled "Forgotten Days" (Bradford, 1956) and "Palmerston North: A Centennial History"

(Petersen, 1973). These titles signal that the authors were perhaps only semi-conscious about leaving some important part of history, the decades and even centuries of Maori settlement, almost entirely out of their volumes.

For this reason an emphasis on the long history that began with various Maori tribes living in the Manawatu region for hundreds of years is needed. These early Maori influences still have an effect on everyday life, the structure and patterns, and the services available in the community.

The Naming of Manawatu and the Rangitane Tribe

Manawatu is the name derived from the major river that flows through the region. Legends tell of a tohunga (high priest) named Haunui who migrated to Aotearoa (New Zealand) aboard a particular canoe, Kurahaupo. This canoe brought the early Maori people to Aotearoa. When his wife ran away with another man, Haunui travelled south from the Taranaki region to find her. On his journey Haunui encountered many rivers which he named as he travelled. When he came to a river wider than all the rest, his heart almost stood still, such was his fear that he would not be able to cross it. He named this big river Manawa-tuu, or "heart-stood-still", a name that has been used ever since. In full flood, the Manawatu continues to create fear, and well it should for containment could easily be breached. Civil Defense experts still regard this river as the most frightening and potentially most damaging aspect of the entire region.

Today, the Rangitane Tribe is tangata whenua ("people of the earth") in this area. Rangitane trace their ancestry to Whatonga, the chief on the Kurahaupo canoe. Whatonga explored the southern North Island and divided it between his sons. Manawatu was part of the area given to his youngest, Tautoki.

Tautoki had a son of his own, Tauenuiarangi, or Rangitane for short. Rangitane's descendants settled all through the area given to his father,

many of them in the Manawatu. In honour of their famous ancestor, they eventually took Rangitane as their tribal name and even today, identify themselves proudly as Rangitane. They divided the land among themselves and as their number increased, several hapu (subtribes) were formed.

After these early times, many different stories emerged. What is heard and read in different sources does not always agree and is not always consistent. An old Maori saying is that 'Ehara I te mea, he kotahi tangata nana I whakaara I te po'. This can be translated as: "There was not only one man awake in the dark ages so none can claim that their version is the only true one". Points of view vary, whether oral or written, whether Maori or Pakeha, and whether long ago or recent. King (1997) for example, warns that stories are no substitute for history. The purpose of stories was more to give meaning and continuity. Legends reveal information about Hapu and Iwi, their origin and history, about internal tribal relationships, and migration; they do not provide the only possible answer in a Pakeha or Western sense but do provide a selective account to explain and justify the past to one's own people.

A Century of Change

The nineteenth century was one of great change for the Rangitane people as waves of invaders and immigrants from different Maori tribes and later from Europe competed for their land. Ngati Toa chief, Te Rauparaha, took the Manawatu coast in 1822-23, while his Ngati Raukawa allies from Waikato migrated to Manawatu from 1825-1830. Many battles and much strife took place and Rangitane retreated to their ancestral fortresses inland. Puketotara Pa, located at the junction of the Manawatu and the Oroua rivers, was one of the largest fortified settlements of the Rangitane tribe. Until the middle of the nineteenth century, it was home to hundreds of Rangitane people and was the major trading center for the surrounding region.

The Rangitane were well organized in terms of their social and economic system. Ngati Rangitane was interrelated but maintained several independent Hapu. In crisis or war, they would act together collectively and with vigour. If there were danger, for example, such as a war party coming through the Manawatu Gorge, the

Rangitane from the area to the east would try to get through to warn the Hineaute Hapu, settled between the gorge and the present site of the city of Palmerston North. The Hineaute Hapu would then seek to warn the other Hapu of the region.

The arrival of Europeans in the 1830s and 1840s meant equally great changes for the Rangitane people and the Manawatu region. Once covered in dense bush and large swamps, the natural landscape for the tangata whenua featured immense forests, wetlands and coastal sand dunes. The Rangitane burned and cleared the forests and were dependent on and made use of the region's abundant natural resources such as fish, eels, birds and flax. The greatest and most destructive impact on the bush and landscape, however, came with the arrival of the Europeans.

After initial contact along the Manawatu, the social consequences of economic and technical change were quickly felt. Around 1850 some 70 Europeans lived in the Manawatu. Much of Ngati Rangitane economic activity changed to accommodate to the settlers' needs. The major product became flax, although the supply and demand fluctuated. Wheat production increased. Many established gardens were carefully fenced, to grow oats, barley, maize, potatoes and fruit trees. Beehives became more common. Some Rangitane were hired by Europeans to keep stores and become traders. Others organized their own trades. As Rangitane came in contact with the Europeans, their social groups and housing styles began to change. Typically, bigger collective groups began to break up into smaller families. European items, such as cloth and furniture, were adopted.

In the 1860s huge areas of wetlands were drained and made into flax farms for the flax industry. When mass settlement began people wanted the land for farming and the timber for building. Sawmills became Manawatu's main industry and over 90 percent of the region's forest was felled by 1920. Literally, it took only one generation of Europeans to clear 1000 years of forest growth. Clearing of the forests and draining of the wetlands also caused frequent and severe soil erosion and massive floods. Over time, the course of the Manawatu River changed and its banks were altered to try to control the floodwaters. From a land of once immense forests and wetlands, Manawatu today is an organized

landscape of farmlands, fences and gardens. The flooding possibilities remain a serious and very real threat.

Rangitane had mainly peaceful relationships with the European settlers. From the 1830s onward, traders and missionaries lived amongst the Rangitane people and introduced European customs, money and religion. Looking for new land and a new start, more and more settlers began to arrive from Europe. These hardy and enterprising settlers included traders, whalers and flax cutters as well as missionaries from England and Scotland. With mass Pakeha settlement, life for the Rangitane changed more and more dramatically, as they were forced to adapt to the European way of life, becoming "civilized". Many found work in the flax milling and timber industries. Some worked on European's farms or became farmers themselves.

The biggest immigration wave began after 1864 when Rangitane sold the Te Ahu-a-Turanga block of land to the New Zealand government, paving the way for major European settlement. In the 1860s most settlers in the Manawatu were British, but Scandinavian influence played an important role for this region as well. Scandinavian settlers arrived in the Manawatu after 1871 under a national immigration scheme. Settlers were brought into New Zealand to work on roads and railroads in return for rights to obtain land. These hard working people cleared Manawatu's forests, worked on the railroad and established farms. By 1874, one third of Palmerston North's population was Scandinavian.

The main political and engineering influence, however, came from the British. One outstanding personality, John Tiffin Stewart, is often mentioned as a key early leader. Stewart, born in Scotland in 1827, studied civil engineering before sailing to Australia in 1852. In 1855 he arrived in Auckland to build his career in surveying and engineering. He was responsible for surveying much of the Manawatu region from around 1858. During his survey work Stewart relied upon the kindness and goodwill of the Rangitane people who provided him with guides, canoes, food and shelter. He soon became fluent in the Maori language and was well acquainted with the Rangitane chief, Te Peeti Te Awe Awe. This chief was one of the decisive participants in the subsequent land sale to the government. The Rangitane were loyal towards the government during the Land Wars, in contrast with others

who fought bitterly against government forces.

The Te Ahu a Turanga block amounted to some 250,000 acres, extending from Linton to the south to Apiti in the north. Most but not all Ngati Rangitane Hapu agreed to the sale. One can now, in retrospect, ask why the Rangitane sold their land, and was the sale by willing partners, or was it under duress. The pressure by the settlers on Ngati Rangitane to sell was intense and persistent. The settlers wanted fertile and accessible land, ownership and rights in perpetuity. Selling in reality, meant simply that the Rangitane avoided bloodshed, war or land confiscation. Once sold, the Ngati Rangitane moved only slowly as the chunk of land was further divided and sold to various settlers. Certain areas were set aside for their use.

The sale of this land brought surveyors, more settlers, destruction of the bush and vegetation, roads, then even more settlers along with their agricultural economy. Road construction led to a tramway between Palmerston North and Foxton. A village was established near Oroua Bridge as the river no longer was the major or only means of transport.

Stewart is also recognized as the person who first suggested that the large clearing known as Papaioea would be a good site for a European settlement. This settlement became known as Palmerston North, founded in 1866. He laid the plans for the settlement and also was responsible for constructing the first roads in the Manawatu region including the road through The Gorge through the ranges to the east in 1871. He also planned the construction of the tramway between Foxton and Palmerston North.

Originally called simply "Palmerston" after the British peer and Prime Minister, Lord Palmerston, the name worried local settlers who felt their town lacked identity and was confused with other Palmerstons, notably a town near Dunedin on the South Island. A public meeting was held to decide on a new name but after a full evening's discussion all that could be agreed upon was that "Palmerston North" was an improvement – and "all went home dissatisfied".

At the very center of Palmerston North, Te Marae o Hine is the Maori name of the Palmerston North Square and means the "courtyard of the daughter of peace." This name was decided on by a special meeting of all Maori tribal groups in this region in the 1870's. Maori were not only helpful to the newcomers, but remained peaceful.

One might inquire, did they actually have a choice?

Rangitane and The Manawatu More Recently

From the 1920's outside influences increased and many Rangitane moved to Palmerston North. The depression years of the 1930's were very hard for them and the continuation of their customs. The settlers took effective control of the economy, schooling, sources of information, and most of all, firmly established English as the only language to be heard and spoken. Deprived of te Reo, or their language, Maori were then treated as second class, for example, they only received 50 percent of the unemployment benefit rate. To survive, they had to behave in the Pakeha way, and act according to Pakeha rules. However, that meant that their precious customs, their traditional ways of behaving and living, and their language became secondary or were surrendered. Their social structures suffered. Poor health, a broken economy and high unemployment were not the exception, but the rule. The settlers could prosper, but the Rangitane could not.

Despite centuries of change since their ancestor Whatonga first set foot in this area, the Rangitane people continue today, with pride and mana, to maintain their unique status as tangata whenua of Manawatu. In fact, in the 1970s and 80s the downward historical trends for Maori began to change. The Maori Landmarch in 1975 and other activities such as the setting up of the Waitangi Tribunal created an atmosphere of iwi revitalization. As a result, a revitalisation among Hapu has taken place, leading to renewed interest in te Reo or restoration of the Maori language, with some early childhood education now conducted entirely in Maori. Too, more political action has led to even more prospects for more positive change in the future.

Tanenuiarangi Manawatu Incorporated was established in 1989 to serve as the Iwi Authority for Rangitane ki Manawatu. In 1991, Tanenuiarangi Manawatu Incorporated lodged a Waitangi Tribunal Claim stating that the Crown had failed to protect Ngati Rangitane rights over the Manawatu River, that the negotiations that led to land sales of the Rangitikei Manawatu and the Te Ahu a Turangi block were inconsistent with the Treaty of Waitangi because they created dissen-

sion and disputes, and that promises to establish Reserves were never honoured (Waitangi Tribunal Claim, Wai182).

The Tanenuiarangi Manawatu Incorporated has built an urban Marae, maintains Kia Ora-FM that has a commitment to broadcast in the Rangitane language, and promotes Rangitane culture. They have also maintained a health clinic called Best Care Whakapai Houora, which translated means empowering Maori to look after their well-being. Many initiatives like the Maori Health Clinic or the Waitangi Tribunal Claim go further, the Rangitane are claiming back self-control over services Pakeha could or were not willing to deliver.

Today Rangitane are deeply involved in the region's politics, health, education and culture, even if still very much separated psychologically from the Pakeha culture. Apart from other facilities, events, and programs influenced by the tribe, the Rangitane health center and radio station found in today's Palmerston North often appear to be unknown to the Pakeha.

The Tararua Ranges in the east and south and the Ruahine Ranges in the east and north nestle Palmerston North, leaving it open only westwards toward the Tasman Sea coast, 30 to 40 kilometers away. A passage through Manawatu Gorge eastwards where the Manawatu River found its way through when heading towards the Tasman Sea, is still a dangerous route. In some ways, even in the face of tremendous changes in some aspects of life in Palmerston North and the Manawatu region, other things remain much the same.

In conclusion, the Manawatu region and the city of Palmerston North represents a geographical base with a long Maori history and a unique culture born from the uneasy union of Maori and Pakeha. Interaction between these peoples, including that from inter-marriage, interspersed residential patterns, schooling, working, and living, continue, yet cultural differences persist. Economic differentials and politics, plus immigrants from many countries all over the world, add to the mix. Present day events must be seen within this ecological context and as part of the flowering from now distant roots.

KEY WORDS History. Culture. Rangitane People. Palmerston North

ABSTRACT The city of Palmerston North lies in a

geographical district of New Zealand called the Manawatu. The river, bush, and land set constraints on human populations, but also offered rich opportunities for those able to master difficulties and see potential. The early history of this region began with Maori, and especially Rangitane people, who settled and lived successfully here for hundreds of years. The author then traces the later advent of European settlement and colonisation, discusses the resulting changes in the patterns and styles of life, and tells about the current culture as seen by himself as an observer from a different culture.

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