Centre for Maori Studies and Research

Ngahuia Te Awekotuku

The City of Rotorua
And Its Meaning To Ngati Whakaue

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The City of Rotorua and Its Meaning to the People of Te Arawa

To comment initially on the title suggested for this paper, I would like to amend it to "The City of Rotorua and its Meaning for the People of Ngati Whakaue". Reasons for this will be more fully appreciated later in the paper.

Rotorua - the city as we know it today - owes its 'genesis partly to the traffic of missionaries, traders, militia and travellers who foretold an inevitable future for this unique district, and mostly to the tangata whenua of that day, the "proprietors of the soil". Of the many observations recorded, here are three confident projections made in the earliest days of pioneer New Zealand. In 1847, Dr John Johnson, the Colonial Surgeon, wrote:

'Rotorua would be a most agreeable summer residence - pleasing scenery, boating and riding parties to other lakes, hot and cold bathing; and it may be anticipated that at no very distant future, when the true character of its waters as remedial agents has been ascertained, and its beautiful localities and salubrious air are known, it will be part of the country much resorted to by invalids, and by those whose leisure will permit them to vary their residence.'

Hochstetter was even more positive after his visit in 1858:

'I have no doubt that, at no very distant period, this remarkable lake will become the centre of attraction not only for tourists, but also a place of resort for invalids from all parts of the world.'

And Lieutenant Stratton Bates echoed similar sentiments two years later:

'There is no other scene, I believe, in which the wondrous and the beautiful are so intimately connected.' There can be no doubt that one day this place will attract thousands of visitors from all parts of the world.

Thus, once the initial difficulties of colonization were overcome - the effective subjugation of armed protest by the indigenous peoples, and the subsequent acquisition of the richest agricultural lands for settlement - the interior was opened and invited exploration, investment and enjoyment by the colonists. Inevitably, they looked to the wonders of the volcanic region.

Ohinemutu was the stopover point for those en route to Rotomahana, and the Pink and White Terraces, although many enjoyed the hospitality of the Ohinemutu people and the beneficial effects of the soothing waters nearby. Unlike Te Wairoa, where local enterprise had established a Rates Scale which was posted to a notice board photographed as early as 1860, commerce in Ohinemutu did not develop until later in that decade. The incidence of accommodation houses is recorded, however. The earliest descriptions vary considerably from Russell (1868):

'We were received by Pererika and lodged in his house, a very nice well built one, with beautiful mats.'

to Stewart's account:

'Previous to 1872 accommodation for travellers was a whare owned, and business run, by five Maoris. The business capacity of this firm was very limited .... European enterprise soon stepped in, and the
native element soon gave way, so far as hotel keeping was concerned, and confined itself to make the most of travellers otherwise, an art in which they acquired great efficiency.'

Commenting on the latter, i.e. European enterprise, by 1875 there were two hotels operating on the slopes of Pukeroa, immediately above Ohinemutu kainga. One was the "Ohinemutu", probably opened by one Harry Carter, alias Ari Katera, whose ethnic origin from this point in time remains, alas, obscure; he soon sold out to Isaac Wilson who was responsible for much of the hotel as we know it - the famous "Lake House", now the "Lakes Tavern". The other establishment became known as "Mrs Morrison's Family Hotel", a familiar surname in Rotorua - it was originally built by Mr Thomas Bennett, father of the first Bishop of Aotearoa. It was not licensed.

By 1880, a third hotel, the "Palace" was standing at the intersection of Lake Road and Ranolf Street, immediately below the Lake House. It was moved to a site on the corner of Arawa and Tutanekei Streets some time after the township area had been finally determined. A poignant reminder of this immensely popular place, and Robertson's stable nearby, may still be seen at that intersection, a weathered horse trough between two oak trees.

There were two main vehicular routes from Tauranga, both via Maketu and Rotoiti, both barely negotiable. Although of paramount importance during the military campaigns of the 1860's, it was not until the visit of HRH Duke of Edinburgh in 1870, that it was made public policy that a direct route be opened from Tauranga to Rotorua. Thirteen years later, a coach road had been carved through the Mamaku Forest. By 1873, the main road was opened for vehicular traffic, and the first mail coach passed on its way from Napier to Tauranga. A telegraph service was operative as early as 1870, and the Rotorua office opened at Te Hōgāe in 1871. Later, in 1875, it transmitted from a wharewhakairo in Ohinemutu, the house "Tiki", and later the service shifted to new premises near the Utuhina stream.

Needless to say, to accommodate the varying tastes of the visitors, and the newly acquired appetites of the locals, retail outlets were soon establist Ollivier, a traveller in 1871, comments thus:

'There is a fair accommodation for a limited number of travellers to be obtained at the store, which is kept by a most enterprising native who is most civil and obliging.'

And by 1880, Tapsell describes the appearance of a flourishing colonial town, no longer just a watering place for those en route for the fabled Te Tarata. That year, the visitor traffic had increased considerably and the government began to contemplate the unique economic potential of that area, billed thus in a tourist guide of 1872 and republished soon after in London:

'Haw shall I attempt to describe Rotomahana? If photography cannot do it justice, which it does not, how can the effete tracings of my pen soar to the conception of the most remarkable and most beautiful phenomena of nature that I have ever as yet seen in the world. Niagara, with all its grandeur is after all but a gigantic waterfall, and the Yosemite Valley is nothing more than a deep gorge unequalled by any other gorge for wilderness and beauty; but the wonders of Rotomahana stand, as far as I know, by themselves, not only unequalled, but incomparable.'
With such extravagant promotion, and the timely sightseeing reconnaissance of F.J. Moss, M.P., it was becoming evident that facilities offered in the district at that time were by no means adequately meeting the ever increasing demand— a demand that promised gargantuan capital returns. As the late Maniera Kingi, an elder and respected spokesman of Ngati Whakaue, observed:

The botorua area, with its thermal wonders and lakes, was attracting visitors from overseas—the Pink and White Terraces were irresistible. The Government of the day—1860—realizing the district had valuable assets to be exploited, decided that a town should be founded on a site central to these assets.

At the same time, certain Europeans were entering into casual leasehold agreements with Maoris whose titles had never been investigated, and these paketa enjoyed occupational tenure with no legal basis—thus, some form of government intervention seemed advisable and in the interests of all parties. Despite initial opposition from the business community of Ohinemutu, negotiations for a township were soon underway. The first meeting was held in November 1860, the Chief Judge of the Maori Land Court, Fenton, acting for the government. In his opening address, he advocated "the creation of a township, and the setting aside of the thermal springs, "hei oranga no nga iwi katoa o te Ao", for the benefit of the people of the world". He stressed that leases were acceptable and invited the assembly of Ngati Whakaue, Ngati Rangiwhaewa, and Wgati Uenukuakopako, to nominate representatives "to cooperate with me in drawing up conditions for the establishment of a town". Four were from Ngati Whakaue, and one each came from the other two. From this meeting emerged the historic Agreement for a Township at Ohinemutu between Francis Carr Fenton for the Government of New Zealand, and the Chiefs of Ngati Whakaue, Ngati Rangiwhaewa, and Ngati Uenukuakopako the Supposed Owners of the Soil. By this agreement, settled in the Tamatekapua meeting house, provision was made for the creation of beneficial public trusts, of which a little more later.

Just over six months passed, and on 28 June 1881, the Native Land Court awarded ownership of the proposed town site to Ngati Whakaue. A Certificate of Title in favour of some 295 members was issued on 27 April 1862—they comprised the six hapu of Ngati Whakaue—Rorooterangi, Tunohopu, Rangivaho, Pukaki, Hurunga, and Taecou. By that time Rotorua was already a township, declared so by proclamation of 12 October 1881, in the wake of the Thermal Springs Act that came into being 24 September 1881. This Act endorsed Fenton's Agreement with the Maori people, and the preamble clearly recites the government's intention.

'It would be advantageous to the colony, and beneficial to the Maori owners of the land in which the natural mineral springs and thermal waters exist that such localities should be opened to colonization, and made available for settlement.'

With such bountiful prospects, it is not surprising that the leasehold opportunities offered by auction, even long before individual ownership of each piece was ever determined, were greedily snatched up. And yet, ironically, the leases which were for a 99 year tenure, soon became a highly contentious, even disagreeable issue. In spite of breathless publicity and promotion overseas, the new town was hit by the current economic recession. One Guide Book reiterates:

'... the Government township of "Fentonville" has proved a most lamentable failure ... not one in four of the purchasers will pay a second half-year's rent for they can see clearly that the town will never be there.'

And the Bay of Plenty Times reported in May 1882:

'The only houses yet in "Rotten Egg Town" are three government buildings,
the Courthouse, which is a small weatherboard cottage, the bathing pavilion just completed, and the pavilion-keeper's residence.'

Ignoring the somewhat tasteless description, it is intriguing to note from this point in time that between 1861 - 1890, a sum of £27,182 had been spent from the public Consolidated Fund on the Sanatorium, and a sum of £11,749 from the Public Works Fund. This amounts to four times as much as the money paid later to Ngati Whakaue for title to the entire township area. For this investment, the government must surely have expected returns which were, alas, not immediately forthcoming.

Within three years of the leases being negotiated, by May 1883, unpaid rents owing to Ngati Whakaue exceeded £2,000. In February of that year an Agreement further endorsing the 1880 (Fenton) contract, mending some clauses and adding others, was signed by Ngati Whakaue and Judge Henry Tacy Clarke for the government.

The Commissioner of Crown Lands was instructed by the Attorney-General to recover the rents, but at the same time, by 27 July, the Rotorua Leaseholders Defence Association had formed and sought legal advice confirming their contention that the whole transaction with the Natives was void. On 18 August, the Thermal Districts Amendment Act was passed to ratify the Agreement with Clark. It was described in the Attorney-General's memo to the Auditor-General as an act "to remove several legal difficulties in reference to the Rotorua lands". The Auditor-General had stressed that there could be no doubt that in equity the government was responsible to the Native owners for the rentals, and that they ought to-for that reason be recovered with more than usual punctuality.

To complicate some matters further, but make proceedings seem more judicious, a Land Court judgement of 22 April 1884 stated that the six hapu of Ngati Whakaue were not equally entitled to the block, Pukeroa-Oruawhata, upon which the township was planned. It is recorded that for the sake of convenience, the approximate area of 2,766 acres was then divided into 250 shares, of which each hapu got around 30 shares of about 332 acres, until the lot was absorbed. This transpired notwithstanding the preliminary statement - lists of names were drawn up but nothing further was done.

Trouble over leases continued to proliferate. In January 1885, a delegation of leaseholders called on the Minister of Lands who was also the Native Minister. In his 1936 Report on the Inquiry into Petitions 55 and 146, which were presented by Ngati Whakaue on the issues of rents and ultimate purchase, Chief Judge R.N. Jones maintained that it was upheld that:

'the Government were in the position where they were compelled either to take some action to maintain what they had done, or they were placing themselves in the position of having deceived the Natives. In conclusion, the Government had absolutely no power to break the contract.'

The Solicitor-General suggested that the leases could be surrendered with the consent of the lessors. This later proved unpracticable, so provisions were made for re-entry for non-payment of rent. By 1888, after the catastrophic Taravera eruption of two years earlier, a considerable number of leaseholders had thus surrendered their leases. About this time, no doubt to salvage their heavy investment, the government was investigating the feasibility of purchase. The Member of Parliament for the district, and Taiwhanga, the Maori member of the House of Representatives, were lobbying for the Crown to buy the freehold title. Negotiations were soon underway.
According to the Jones Report, on 29 February 1888 (methinks a suitably shady day for such a deal), intrinsic evidence suggests that a list based on 1100 shares, and not the original 250 of the April 1884 Judgement, was prepared by Judge Tacy Clark at his Wainate house. There is apparently no record of this on the Maori Land Court Register of that year. The figure, 1100, was supposedly for use in rent distribution only, rather than in determining individual land interests. But to quote Jones again:

'The parties bought and sold on that list of shares, and it cannot now be altered, but it shows that the Natives were not, as should have been done, told the full facts and put upon their guard, but led to believe the finding as to the shares was unassailable.'

And recalling the words of Raniera King:

'Whatever irregularities the Government practised were validated by legislation.'

In September 1888, Ngati Whakaue offered to sell the land - 3020 acres which included the Reserves - for 15,000. A few weeks later, the Surveyor-General assessed the land as "very inferior" and worth no more than forty shillings an acre. The Resident Magistrate then announced that the Maoris would, in his opinion, accept 6,400.

The sale of the township was negotiated by May 1890 at 8,250 for 1973 acres, the balance of 1047 being Reserve land.

That same year there was an important case, Eruera te Urumutu v. the Queen, in which Eruera alleged the government had been negligent in the collection of rent. This action was barred by the Crown Suits Act because it had not been commenced within twelve months of the occurrence of the alleged grievance. The hearing revealed that in the majority of leasehold agreements, the Commissioner of Crown Lands, or his agent, had re-entered the property for non-payment of rent. Predictably, the issue of leases was never satisfactorily resolved and the frustrations, intrigues and confusion have persisted to this day. Meanwhile, as I have outlined, the sale of the disputed area was finalised, and this effectively, albeit temporarily, defused and thus stabilized the situation.

The township slowly began to develop despite all this. More hotels were built, and after the 1886 destruction of Te Wairoa, the Tuhourangi people were resettled at Whakarewarewa, on land gifted by Ngati Whakaue, but with which the descendants of Wahiao had great traditional affinity. Within five years, the enterprising refugees were again plying a lucrative trade, the Geyser Hotel had opened its doors, and negotiations had begun for a railway facilitating overland access through the potentially affluent areas of Cambridge and the Waikato. The railway opened in 1894 - as many as 400 people were arriving daily - their excursion predicting the package tour bus phenomenon, and Whaka as we know it today. The government had their initially disastrous investment under scrutiny, and subsequently, the First Annual Report of the New Zealand Department of Tourist and Health Resorts was tabled in July 1902. To quote the Report, page 8, heading "Rotorua":

'The popularity of this resort is advancing by leaps and bounds. From the thousands of visitors of more or less note, one hears only a chorus of appreciation regarding its unique and interesting surroundings,'

20 years later, the Government Bathhouse was built and officially opened in 1908.
Meanwhile, litigation on the part of Ngati Whakaue continued as the reality of the founding transactions was revealed. Little real satisfaction was afforded by the government in December 1930, however, certain interests were conceded by Order of the Maori Land Court to those beneficiaries of Pukeroa-Oruawhata. In other words to the descendants of the original vendors of the township site. These interests are in the township boundary, and moves are now being made for the administration of these properties to be transferred from the Maori Trustee to the people of Ngati Whakaue. Further monetary compensation was also considered, as the 1936 Jones report indicates.

To fully understand the importance of the city of Rotorua to the people of Ngati Whakaue, one must recall that of the 3020 acres alienated in the sale of the freehold title, only 1973 were actually paid for by the government. One elder once commented:

'1047 acres were given gratis, which is still, and will ever remain a monument to the generosity of our people.'

The conditions of the Trust Reserves were set in both the 1880 and 1883 Agreements made with Penton and Tacy Clark respectively.

Provisions were made to cover Health, Transport, Recreation, Municipal and Education Reserves, the last especially benefitting from the elders' foresight. It has been since contended that in some specific instances, a breach of trust has occurred - the ramifications of this are too involved and time consuming for this presentation. Suffice to say that a thorough investigation of these instances is continuing.

Much interest was generated throughout the resident community of Ohinemutu, and the hapu, by a sudden and unanticipated move on the part of the Rotorua City Council two years ago in 1974. Whereas in the past, the municipal authority had tacitly agreed to maintain and repair the privately owned streets of Ohinemutu kainga - never part of the township proper - more recent councils considered that they were not empowered to do so. Thus, the unwritten 'Gentlemen's Agreement' respected for so many decades by successive councils was ignored, and the condition of the street surfaces deteriorated dangerously. Little wonder with thirty plus massive scenic coaches sliding by each day in peak tourist season! The Council maintained that, in order to repair the roads, they must be dedicated, title to the area being vested in the Council. Despite tremendously effective and well supported opposition organized by the Kotahitanga o Ngati Whakaue, a tribal group representative of a wide cross section of the hapu, legislation was passed declaring the roads public and dedicated in 1974. It seemed ironic to the offsprings of the first proprietors of the township site that so little productive consultation was permitted by the ruling powers.

Still, the question remains - what meaning has the city of Rotorua to the people of Ngati Whakaue?

There is the history - the siting, the lease, the sale. There are the Reserves - 1047 acres, yet still subject to exhaustive inquiry and intrigue. And stretching to the west, to the south, are the rolling hills now farmed by the Ngati Whakaue Tribal Lands Incorporation, into which the future city must inevitably expand.

More significantly, there are the street names in the township itself - forever a memorial to the planning and perception of those ambitious people, and a few of their forebears. These names? Arava Street - the tribe; Pukaki and Whakaue - early ancestors of the donors; Rangiuru, wife of Whakaue, and mother of Tutanekai, who is also remembered, and there is Hinemoa, his much celebrated wife, and her mother, Hinemaru.
And there are the more recent, immediate names - Haupapa, Pukuatua, Eruera, Amokau, and Pererika - now living parts of a city in whose beginning they played such a vital role.

Through these people came the city of Rotorua today.

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