

Nga tupuna o nga ra o mua — The dictionary of New Zealand Biography

A written history of Aotearoa is being prepared by a government sponsored team, and the tangata whenua are being asked to take a major part in this.

The scope of the work spans pre-European times to late 20th century, with the first volume 1769-1869 due out in 1990. This volume is in english and maori.

The Maori view of history and the recording of that differs from that of the pakeha and it has been the job of Miria Simpson to let the people on the marae know about the project. For the past year she has been taking this kaupapa onto the marae for the consideration of the home people.

She's told the people that it's up to them to put forward the names of the tupuna they would like to see recorded in the New Zealand biography. Information about the life of those people has also been requested.

Miria's concentrated on covering the ground by rohe and takiwa, rather than

hapu and iwi. She says the elders will ultimately decide who are the tupuna, they consider should be written about. A contact list of people available to take down these names and information about the tupuna is printed along with this story.

Miria says she sees the project as being beneficial to the Maori people, not so much because of the historical volumes produced, but for the gathering of an information base for the Maori people nationally. With the permission of those volunteering it's hoped to input the information onto computer and then make it accessible to the tangata whenua.

The 1769-1869 date for the first volume to be published has been chosen as the time of Captain Cook being discovered by the Maori, to the time of

the British parliamentary system being confronted with its first Maori member of parliament.

As well as the pre-European volume and the 1769-1869 volume, two other time periods will be covered, from 1870-early 20th century, and from early to later 20th century. Publication is intended in the 1990's.

Each period of history will separately be produced in english and maori languages.

Miria Simpson is part of a full-time editorial staff, comprising Bill Oliver, James Bellish and Claudia Orange. Mr John Rangihau, Mr Neville Baker, Dr R Williams, Mr Tipene O'Regan and Mr Wiremu Parker are also part of the team.

Money for the project is coming from the Department of Internal Affairs and the Lottery Fund Board. No profit in money is intended but it is acknowledged that the profit to Aotearoa will be considerable.



Claudia Orange, Bill Oliver, Miria Simpson, James Bellish.