

# In search of turangawaewae

While angry young Maoris confronted trustees, elders and police at Waitangi earlier this year, a much more optimistic land issue was being worked out at Papawai marae in Greytown.

Shareholders in the Mangakino Township Incorporation were trying to find out about 700 elusive fellow owners who sank into oblivion during the confused history of the \$11.5 million block of land.

The missing partners — descendants of the Kahungunu Ki Wairarapa tribal group — were needed urgently to vote on whether to take full control of their inheritance, part of which is managed by Maori Affairs. After the weekend it appeared there were enough owners to vote at the annual general meeting later this year.

But for the 300 Maoris who went to Papawai, possible financial rewards were far less important than finding out about family and tribal ties and getting to know newly discovered relatives.

## Juliet Ashton reports.

Inside the meeting house at Papawai marae research worker Joe Williams flicks through his filing cabinets, back against the dark traditional outlines on the wall.

"This is the only one we've got," he says, showing a card with a long Maori name typed neatly on it.

"That's him, that's my grandfather," gleefully says the carefully dressed young mother, noting the number on the card.

She moves on to the next bench where kaumatua (elders) and Maori Affairs staff are on hand with more information.

Similar scenes are repeated all day as visitors from as far away as Auckland and Blenheim queue to find out who they are related to and if they are entitled to shares.

Joe, jeaned and bearded, is a third year Maori studies and law student whose own tribal affiliations are far away in Hauraki.

He and Andrew McNicol, a fifth year law and commerce student, have spent their summer break masterminding a system for tracing successors to the Pouakani Block.

## Listing all

Working through Maori Land Court records since the 1870s they have been listing all those who succeeded or should have succeeded, to shares from the original 139 owners — about 3000 in all.

The next problem was finding out who is still alive and where. "We find a lot of people on paper but we need addresses — so we're doing a sort of census at the same time."

Their biggest headache was the total disorder and mis-spelling of the old land court records. "Each clerk lasted only about five years and each had a different system and different spelling," Joe says.

Additional problems were caused by

a profusion of both wives and aliases as well as a variety of other traps. "We have people succeeding under their maiden name but dying under their married name."

But, spurred on by the feeling that they were assisting in a positive step for Maori land they finally pieced together the mammoth jigsaw puzzle.

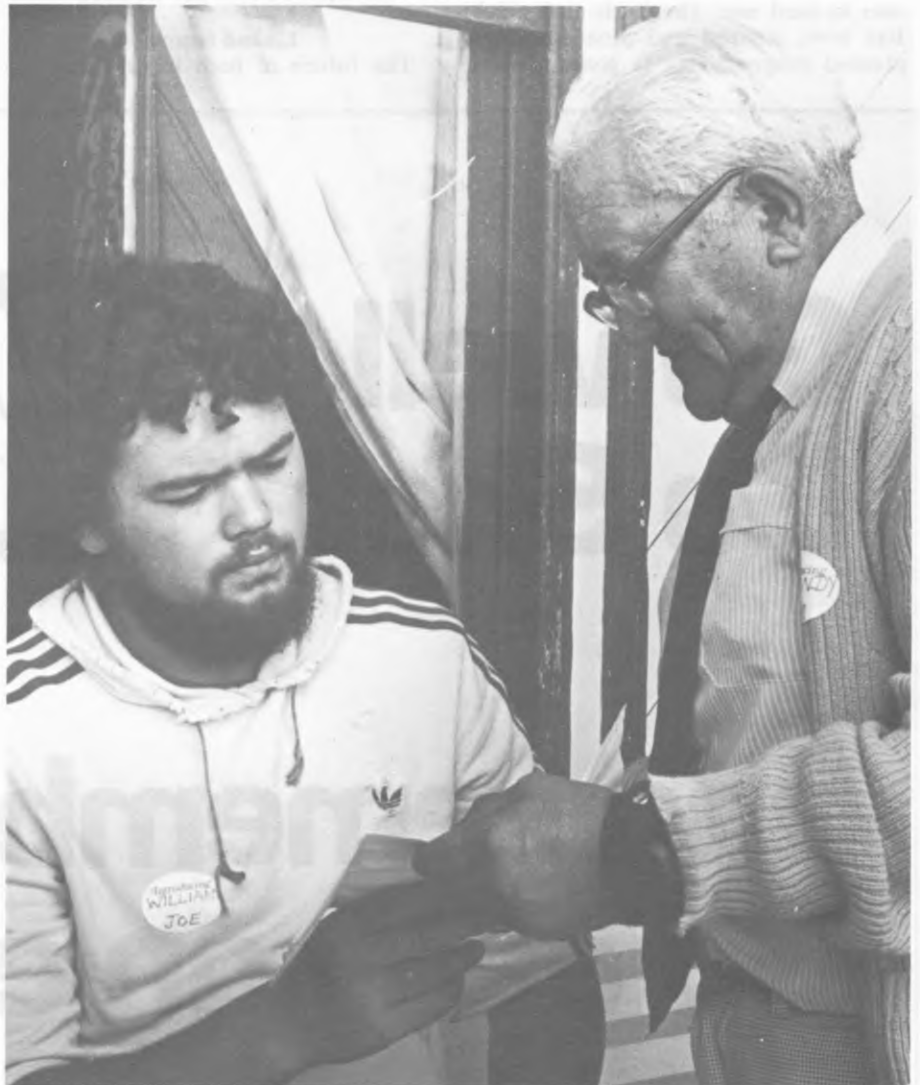
## Hold the key

Joe believes strongly that incorporations could hold the key to the future survival of Maori land.

Since Maori land titles were individualised in the 1860s he says, the Maori Land Court, Maori Affairs Department and all land legislation has been designed to alienate the land — right up to the 1970s when it was far too late to reverse the trend.

Maori land these days lacks cohesion — "Too many of them have sold their land or had it taken," he says. The remnants left are too fragmented for constructive management.

"Incorporations are almost a Maori concept. They do away with the individualisation of land," Joe says. "Incorporations give people their own turangawaewae. They bring people together — keep alive the whakapapa, the bloodlines, the stories about people, the language."



Research worker Joe Williams discusses land court records with Ngati Kahungunu elder Kerenene Taurau (Jimmy Mundy).