



The discrepancies in the accounts of the house's origins begin even before it was built, and it would be wrong here to favour one group's beliefs over another's, so we shall give all the known ones an airing.

One tradition has it that after the Battle of Orakau Pa in 1864 — the last great battle of the Waikato Wars — King Tawhiao and his people retreated into the King Country, where he soon received visitors from Ngati Rereahu.

When he realised Rereahu had no place to receive and entertain large groups of manuhiri, he told a leading chieftainess, Ngaharakeke, she should build a house, which confirmed a tohunga's prediction of two years earlier.

But Bob Mahue, the chairman of the trust board which administers the site, says its construction had nothing to do with Tawhiao. It was built after a kuia of Rereahu dreamt of a house which came from heaven.

When her people asked her what the house looked like, she took two fern branches and laid them down in a cross — hence the building's configuration.

Told story

Mr Mahue said the woman was his own great-great-grand aunt, and he was told the story by his father and uncles.

Another version of the house's origins says it was built by a sect called Pao Miere — not to be confused with Pai Marire — which was formed to combat makutu.

And yet another says it was built by or for Pai Marire adherents themselves, but Mr Campin believes there is little evidence to back this opinion.

Tradition has it, too, that the cross shape signified it was open to the four winds, symbolising its use by all the hapu of the district, rather than just one. But Mr Mahue says it was definitely a Ngati Rereahu house.

Mr Campin wrote that its site was in a kind of no-man's land between a number of hapu territories. A kuia told him that years ago she visited no less than 27 pa sites in the surrounding area, so that it represented a place of peace and learning amidst a region of war.

The ridge poles of the house lay on precisely north-south and east-west lines, and were exactly in line with large "niu" poles about 1.5km away in each direction, although they cannot be

Above:

A corner of the central crossing.

Centre:

A detail of the south porch exterior. Lashings for bark can be seen around the purlins.

Left:

The northwest angle, showing two pairs of outer rafters still in position.