

A new history that documents the changes in Maori life from the 1850s to the 1980s is being launched in the Maori Affairs Committee Room in Parliament Buildings in July. It is *Maori: A Social and Photographic History*, by historian Michael King.

According to Dr King, *Maori* differs from previous histories in that it makes widespread use of photographs from Maori sources (about 400). And these photographs are not used simply for impression or decoration; they are presented as historical documents, as evidence of how people looked in particular times and places, and how their lives were changed by the steady intrusion of Western technology into their lives.

The combination of text, photographs and captions make this the most comprehensive Maori history published to date, according to Dr King, current Writer in Residence at Victoria University. "The text provides an overview, a context for the changes that have taken place in Maori life since the arrival of the European. The photographs and captions are full of specific information about places, events, hapu, families and individuals. The index contains more reference material on Maori life than is available from any other source."

It is not the changes in Maori life that have most impressed Dr King, however. "This collection of photographs reveals two things that Pakehas might find unexpected. One is the enormous variety of Maori life: what was happening in, say, the King Country in 1885 was quite different from what was going on in Maori communities in the South Island at the same time. The relative speeds with which European customs and technology were absorbed into Maori life were enormously varied.

"The second surprising thing is the extent to which Maori values and practices persisted beneath a veneer of Pakeha clothing and progressively Pakeha-looking dwellings. Appearances led many earlier European commentators to make the mistake of predicting an eventual end to Maori culture. They could not have been more wrong." The book is divided into sections which look at Maori dwellings, domestic life, hui, tangis, agriculture, transport, leadership, farming, fighting and sport, and points of contact between Maori and Pakeha.

"I have compiled it, largely from Maori sources, in the hope that Maoris will have a better record of the variety and vitality of their own past," said Dr King. "And in the hope that non-Maoris will have a better basis for appreciating the nature of Maori experience from a background of how things have come to be the way they are. The next result should be not just greater respect for things Maori, but a far more informed respect."

New History of the Maori

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