

Aotea Meeting House, Makirikiri



Brief History

In 1880 Ngāti Pakapaka and Ngāti Mutuahi, the two resident branches of the Ngāti-Rangiwahakaewa sub-tribe, began work on the construction of the Aotea Meeting House at Tahoraiti. The timber was obtained locally and milled by one of the first saw mill operators in the area, McLeods Mill. The head carver was a man named Taepa from the Te Arawa Tribe, Rotorua. He was assisted by a local man Ihaka Rautahi. Taepa had just completed the carvings on the original house at Te Oreore, Masterton before shifting to Tahoraiti to undertake this work. His work at Te Oreore contained many unique patterns such as the double spiral, constructed with a double S curve form meeting in the centre. These patterns were artistically important adding a new dimension to the known art forms at that time. Many of these unique patterns are found on these carvings on the Aotea Meeting House.

The local Ngāti-Rangiwahakaewa people, sub-tribe of the Rangitane Tribe, were proud of this meeting house at Tahoraiti. This house ranked as possibly the largest carved meeting house in the country at that time. The house was almost 30 feet wide, had a porch depth of 15 feet 3 inches and an interior length of 99 feet. It ran a massive 114 feet. This house was opened in 1883.

It is noteworthy that three of the

largest houses in the country at this time were in the Rangitane area. The house known as Te Iwa Tekau, at Awahuri near Fielding was 90 feet long; the house at Te Oreore, Masterton was 96 feet long, and Aotea at Tahoraiti was 114 feet in length.

The carved figure on the gable of the house represents Te Hirawanu Kaimokopuna, one of the leading chiefs in this area during the early part of the 19th century.

The Aotea Meeting House stood at Tahoraiti from 1883 until the mid

1960's when it was dismantled and shifted to its present site at Makirikiri. It was officially opened on June 17 1967. Although the present house is only 60 feet long and 25 feet wide, all the carvings were cleaned, painted and replaced in positions as near as possible to the original.

In the late 1970's it became increasingly evident that some of the carvings were in poor condition with dry rot and fungal growth setting in. On 8 November 1980 a close inspection of the carvings was made by Mr Karel

