



The Battle of O-Rākau Heritage Society Inc

Information Fact Sheet - February 2014



1. Who are we?

We are a group of ordinary community people dedicated to the proper protection of the O-Rākau battle site, identification and protection of the mass graves, planning for site development including a more compelling and inclusive war memorial and compiling oral histories related to the Battle and wider Waikato and Colonial wars. The Society is registered as an Incorporated Society. It is the only legal entity dedicated to protecting and preserving the history of O-Rākau and the legacy left by those who fought and fell on its hallowed fields. The Society is a non-profit organisation of like minded people committed to making a difference in the wider community by building bridges between cultures through education and a more complete understanding of history.

2. What do we do?

We plan and host the annual O-Rākau and Colonial Wars Commemorations. We research and compile oral histories, and we inform the public and engage with community groups to raise awareness of the Colonial Wars as part of our Nation's history. We are also responsible for planning and organising the 150th (Sesquicentennial) Commemoration of the Battle of O-Rākau and the End of the War in Waikato War, Tuesday 1st April 2014.

3. What is our long term objective?

The Society is leading a campaign to build a "World Class" Battle-site Heritage Learning and Visitors Centre dedicated to telling the story of O-Rākau within the context of the wider Colonial Wars, and doing so in a way that is informative, accurate, compelling and transformational. We want the Centre to inspire visitors to learn about our unique history and understand how history shapes our view of the world and therefore how we perceive and treat other people. It is hoped the centre will be a catalyst for transforming minds, nurturing a sense of community spirit, and developing meaningful relationships between Pākehā/Europeans and Māori. After more than 150 years, the general public (both Māori and non-Māori) know very little, if anything, of the culture and the people who stood to defend their homes against invading, militarily superior forces who waged war against Māori from 1843 to 1881.

There is still a significant way to go in terms of improving cultural understanding and race relations between the two founding peoples of this modern South Pacific Nation. In the New Zealand of today, we cannot afford to continue with such a divided national memory, where some remember, largely due to the intergenerational trauma they inherit, but where the source of this trauma is consistently forgotten in the 'mainstream story'. Divided memories create divided peoples. Justice, however, is founded on mutual understandings of the past. The Society seeks to advance a more complete and fuller sense of our shared past through our commemoration and research work.

4. Will the proposed Heritage Learning Centre be just another Museum?

No. The proposed Centre will be the completion of a "Living Memorial" to those who fought and fell during the Battle and the wider Colonial Wars. It has a specific purpose which is to tell the story of forgotten Heroes, Patriots and Nation-builders. The Education or Heritage Centre will showcase previously untold family oral histories from the Battle and wider Wars, shared in an extraordinarily moving way. Unlike many museums, this living memorial will be tied to the geographic sites and presented in the appropriate context so the deeds and spirits of those who sacrificed so much will be able to inspire and inform generations to come. The stories of participating Māori, and Imperial and Colonial Soldiers will be housed within the Centre. This project is about recognizing our nationhood and those who sacrificed so much yet whose names and deeds are almost forgotten. The Battle site development will be a two staged project over ten years. Phase 1 will be the construction and erection of a more compelling "living memorial" on site to be unveiled in 2016-2017. Phase 2 will be the building of an award winning Heritage Centre of international standing.

This phase will probably take a further five to seven years. We have, with the assistance of the Waipa District Council and Tourism Waikato, completed a high level feasibility concept which explores a historical journey through both time and space. This report will be the basis of a more comprehensive feasibility study in later years. It is intended that the proposed Centre will also operate a small performing arts education unit which will visit primary, secondary and tertiary schools, taking the message of fallen heroes to the Nation, filling a gaping hole in the mainstream education curriculum.

5. The Vision

The O-Rākau legacy is captured in our vision, which distils the essence of our intentions.

“O-Rākau a place where the enduring power of storytelling will capture, inform and transform hearts and minds of visitors while sowing the seeds of cultural understanding, peace, reconciliation and hope. In this place voices of the past will resonate through the corridors of time speaking directly into the hearts and minds of future generations telling of suffering, loss, of truths untold, courage, heroism and the determination of peoples to be free. The events of our shared past, the deeds and sacrifices made so often and so long ago by Patriots now forgotten, call to us through time and space, yearning to be remembered, to be understood and reminding us of a sacred legacy, of an obligation yet unfulfilled. O-Rākau shall be a medium for transforming community perceptions, prejudices, realities and relationships, over time.....transforming a nation”.

6. Why Commemorate something which happened so long ago, is it still relevant?

Our identity as a nation and the sacrifices made for our freedom were not only forged on the battlefields of Passendale, Gallipoli, Malaya and Vietnam, or in more recent conflicts where our Kiwi soldiers have fought and fallen. Sadly our country has ignored, for more than a hundred years, the sacrifices made by the young soldiers from Australia, Ireland, Scotland and Wales who came to these shores as part of the colonial settlements and expansionist policies of the early to mid 1800's. Many of the soldiers lost their lives on these shores during the wars waged upon Māori who refused to sell lands to the newly arrived settlers. More importantly, the significant sacrifices made by innocent Māori men, women and children who were forced to defend their homes and those of their tribal allies against the superior force of the combined Imperial and Colonial armed forces, intent on the destruction of a group of peoples, along with their economic, social and political infrastructure.

As a very new and modern democracy, it is important that the history of how this country was founded is not overlooked or ignored because of political expedience or fear of the truth. The horrific warfare, the many deaths and the intergenerational social and economic suffering which followed should not be swept under the carpet and forgotten, but rather spoken about and understood in context. It is in understanding and acknowledging the horrors of the past that we are able to understand how we came to be in the present. There is no doubt that the past holds insights into how we can be a better people and a better nation in the future. The key, however, is to unlock the teachings history has to offer and make these relevant in the present.

Present and future generations will continue to benefit from the sacrifices made on the many and bloodied battle fields across this land. However those who inherit this legacy have an obligation to compassionately remember those who lost their lives building the foundations of our society.

When we forget where we have come from, we dismiss the sacrifices others have made in our name as meaningless. It is for this reason the Society in 2011 committed itself to promoting and advancing the idea of a National Day of Remembrance for the Wars of the Colonial Period. This was made public at O-Rākau in 2012 and to date has gained the support of The Kiingitanga and Waikato Tainui leaders. In remembering the past and those who fought for the privileges we all enjoy, we give appreciation and honour where it is due. We are today a Nation of many distinct cultures because of the sacrifices over three thousand Māori, Imperial and Colonial soldiers who died on our shores, have made. We believe their sacrifices deserve to be acknowledged appropriately.

It is unacceptable that only some of our Nation's war dead are acknowledged and recognized publicly and their commemorations fully supported by the government, while others who are deserving of equal recognition are forgotten and ignored, and their commemorations receive negligible, if any, government support. The work of the Society is to bring balance to history and to ensure there is a more complete recognition of our past. A past which encompasses the Battle of O-Rākau, the War against Waikato and the Kiingitanga and the wider trail of tears left in the wake of the Colonial Wars which ravaged our Nation from Wairau (Nelson) in the South to Ngāpuhi in the North, the East Coast across to Waitara and Taranaki in the west.

To accept and acknowledge our shared past is important, it is a major step in reconciling and making peace with ourselves as individuals, families and communities, thus providing conditions necessary for healing injustice and wrongs of the past. Building reconciliation and peace with our past, with ourselves and with each other, is a desirable state which should already exist. Unfortunately this is not yet the reality. Our predominantly European mainstream society and Māori society are still polarised by prejudice and fear, manifested in cultural ignorance and at times callous attitudes. On this front alone, there is much work to be done and the Society has committed itself to being a builder of bridges between cultures.

The O-Rākau Commemoration is about healing wounds of the past and creating a space where new, more informed conversations can be had, and where understandings and relationships based upon a more complete understanding of a shared history can be explored. This day is an important part of our ongoing search for a shared and common identity, a more complete and inclusive idea of Nationhood where the past can inform how and who we are in the present and more importantly how we behave and treat each other as we face the uncertainty of the future. This is a day when we pay tribute to forgotten Patriots and Heroes. It is a day when we commit to putting our hands to the challenging task of bridge building.

7. What has the Society achieved so far?

In summary, the Board of the Society and its predecessor Working Group have to date;

- held a National Consultation Hui at Mokai Marae in 2011;
- planned and hosted four Commemorations on the site;
- held many consultation hui and meetings locally and outside of the district;
- created a set of proposed new war memorial and site concept drawings;
- undertaking a proper archaeological survey of the site to determine the location of the original Paa site and the mass graves where ancestors remains still lie, under the leadership of the District Council and the Historic Places Trust;
- secured financial support for our 2014 Commemoration activities from Maniapoto Maori Trust Board-Fisheries Trust, Waikato Raupatu Lands Trust (Tainui) and the Waipa District Council, Tuwharetoa Fisheries Trust; Trust Waikato and a range of smaller sponsors;
- are active participants and founding members of the Waikato War Commemorations Co-ordination Body - Ngaa Pae O Maumahara.

8. Who can be a member of the Society?

Any person can join. The Society has no ethnic, religious, political or gender restrictions. All applications are approved by the Board of Governors and the membership fee is \$10.00 per annum for adults and \$5.00 for children. The Board of the Society is governed by a formal constitution. We encourage people of good standing, who are self-less and want to serve a just cause to become members.

9. Do we have much support?

Yes, the Society has a lot of support. There have been several consultation meetings and all feedback has been favourable to the proposed work and concepts. Te Arikinui Tuheitia Paki, and Sir Tumu Te Heuheu, Chairman of the Māori Heritage Council of the Historic Places Trust, are behind the work of the Society. In support are Te Tumuaki O Te Kingitanga - Mr Anaru Tarapipipi Tamihana, the Right Hon. Jim Bolger, The Hon. Koro Wetere and Dame Claudia Orange. Together these individuals bring a wealth of knowledge and political weight to the mix so as to advance the vision and plans the Board of the Society has in place. Raukawa, Maniapoto and Waikato-Tainui support the Society plans and have contributed to our work to date both financially and with moral support. Local Marae (Mangatoatoa, Te Kopua, Parawera, Rāwhitiroa, Whakamarama and Aotearoa) are also a key part of our support base as is the Waipa District Council, the Open Waananga and the Kihikihi Rate-Payers Association.

10. How can people help?

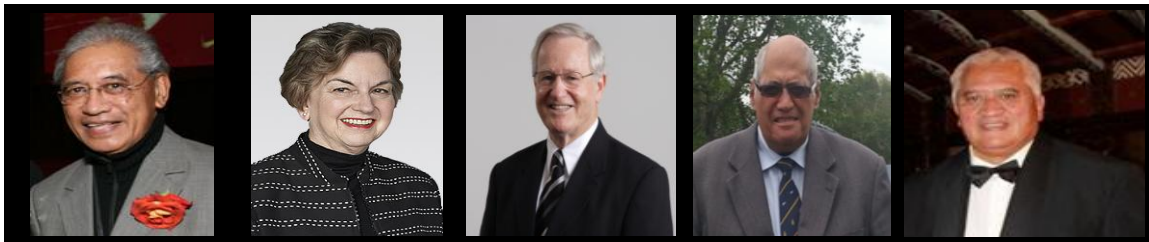
Members of the public can help by becoming a member of the Society, and/or joining as a volunteer helping with the upcoming Commemorations, or by making a small donation to help build up our memorial and site development fund. We are driven by a deep moral conscience to do what is right and your support would be appreciated.

11. Where can you get more information?

general website: orakau300.co.nz

email us: orakau150th@gmail.com

“The story of the last day in Orakau imperishably remains as an inspiration to deeds of courage and fortitude. Nowhere in history did the spirit of pure patriotism blaze up more brightly than in that little earthwork redoubt, torn by gun-fire and strewn with dead and dying. The records of our land are rich in episodes of gallant resistance to overwhelming force, but they hold no parallel to Orakau. Suffering the tortures of thirst, half-blinded with dust and powder-smoke, many bleeding from wounds which there was no time to stanch, ringed by a blaze of rifle-fire, with big-gun shells and grenades exploding among them, the grim band of heroes held their crumbling fort till this hour against six times their number of well-armed, well-fed foes. Now they must retreat, but they would go as free men” - James Cowan (Historian).



OUR PATRONS

Te Ariki Sir Tumu Te Heuheu Dame Claudia Orange The Right Hon. Jim Bolger The Hon. Koro Wetere Te Tumuaki – Anaru Tarapipipi