



Celebrating 30 years
1982-2012



Kevin O'Connor

PREFACE

All history is a matter of choosing between accounts of events, which always vary according to the viewpoints of the people involved. Scholarly histories can examine different viewpoints and weight the evidence in detail.

This is not a scholarly history. It is an attempt to record and preserve the achievements of those involved in establishing and developing the Kokako Trust during its first 30 years. Others have compiled detailed historical accounts of the origins of the people who make up the Trust's owners, and of the events of earlier centuries. A bare summary of those accounts is included here as background to the story of the Trust itself.

I wish to thank the Trustees of the Kokako Trust for the opportunity to meet some wonderful people, ask sometimes nosy questions and poke into areas that would normally be none of my business, then write as much of it as can safely be included in a small publication.

I also thank particularly John Perrin and Trudy Laan of Perrin Ag Consultants Ltd for both the knowledge and photographs they contributed, and Murray Patchell for his assistance and advice, especially his commitment to ensuring as far as possible that the information in this short history is correct. Any remaining errors are mine.

I am honoured to have been asked, and I hope this record, together with whakapapa and traditional history, will help present and succeeding generations to appreciate the achievements of the Trust.

Kevin O'Connor

October 2012

DEDICATION

The Trustees are pleased to present this history of the Kokako Trust, its origins and its achievements in the first 30 years of its existence.

As a Trust, we owe our existence to the foresight of those who, in the 1950s, opposed government plans to redevelop and subdivide the block for lease as small dairy farms, and also to the group of owners in the late 1970s and 1980s who worked for the return of the land to our control.

Among those owners are a number of early Trustees who have passed on including

Henry Simmonds

Norm Steele

Ben Morrison

Jack Te Hou

Tony Karaka

Rota Thomson

Among officers and staff who have served the Trust well over many years, we must mention particularly:

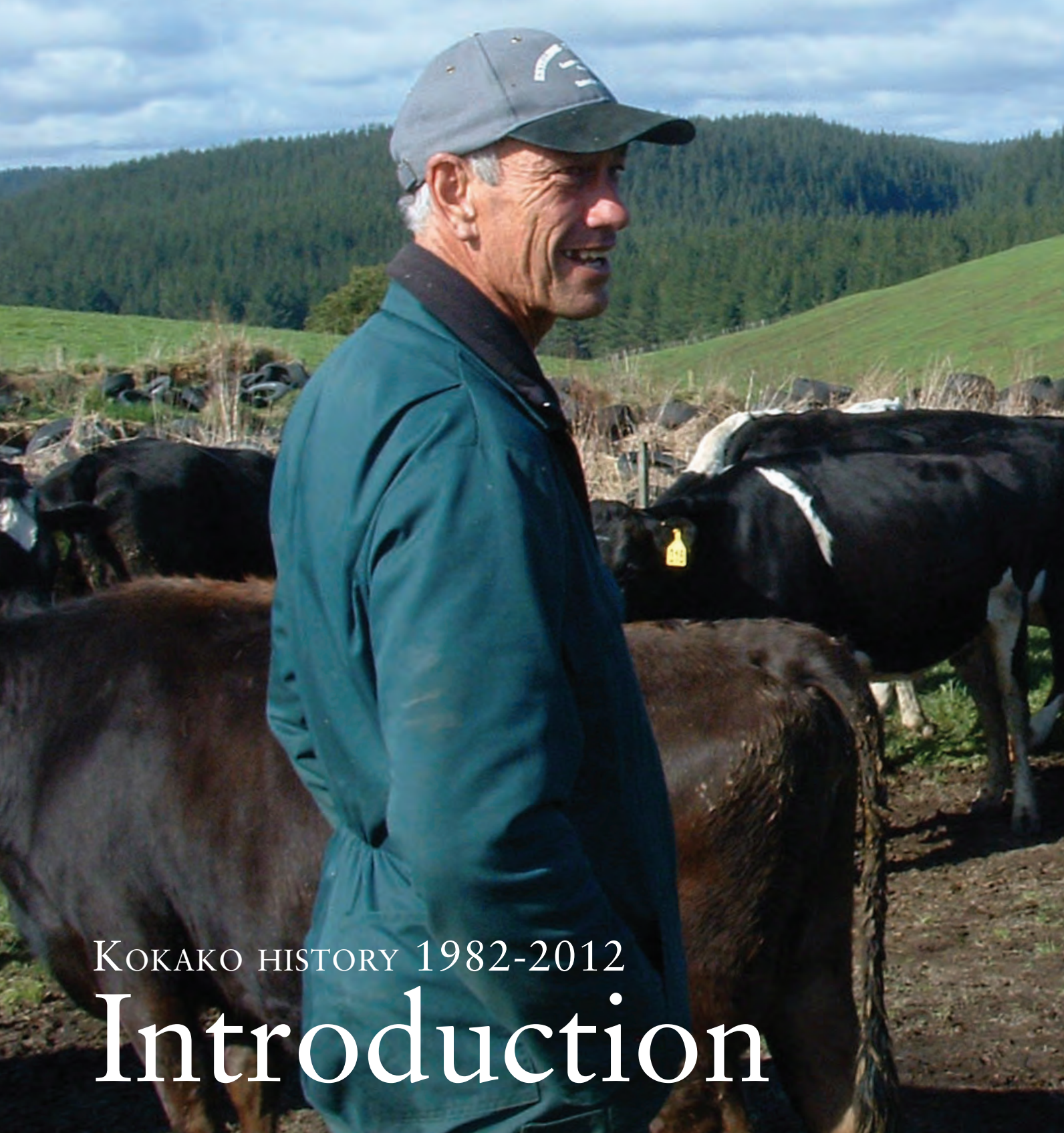
Niel Simmonds, the first to be appointed secretary; *Keith Hinton*, accountant and later secretary, succeeded in both roles by Murray Patchell; *John Perrin* farm supervisor and his successor *Trudy Laan*,

and our managers and sharemilkers over the years.

Particularly notable among past farm staff are the long-serving manager

Bob Bigham, and sharemilkers *Alex and Helen Schweizer*. Key staff today are *Jim Clarke*, *Richard and Sue Cook*, *Jason and Shelley Sabin* and *Andrew Grayling*.

Te Wano Walters QSO, Chairperson, for the Trustees, *Huimai Makela*, *Gloria Koia*, *Jackie Aratema*, *Airini Hepi*.



KOKAKO HISTORY 1982-2012

Introduction

First there was the land. Then came the people, and together they developed the business known today as the Kokako Trust.

This brief history brings together stories of these three elements and focuses particularly on the growing success of one Maori business over the past 30 years.

The time span is limited by the particular

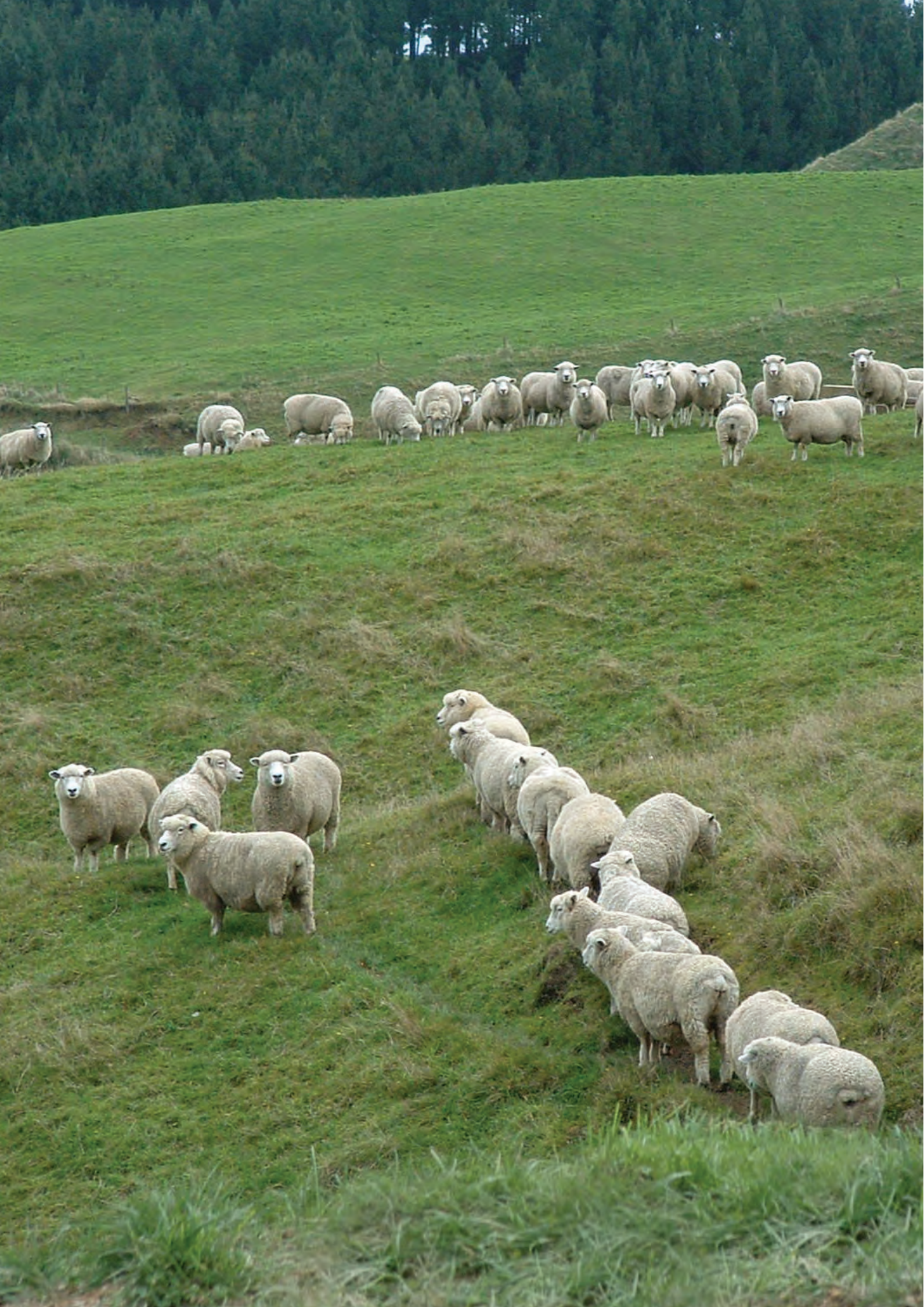
focus of this story and by the need to summarise much of the preceding oral and written information about the people in particular. Inter-tribal fighting and political manoeuvring over this area saw control of the land change a number of times. It is not the purpose of this story to do more than summarise the centuries of to-ing and fro-ing that has produced a community of owners



whose affiliations are, on the surface, much wider and more diverse than those of the owners of many blocks in other areas. While few Maori whakapapa exclusively to just one hapu, the links of owners in this block appear particularly extensive.

The whakapapa links that are covered briefly in this story are of particular value today because they illustrate the increasingly interconnected nature of Maori society.

Most of all, this is a story of growing success based on modern uses of traditional land, maintaining some traditional values while applying modern business methods. 🍷



CHAPTER 1

The Land

The Kokako Block was once the site of several thriving Maori settlements, with rich bird life and eels in the creeks for food, and successful cultivations. The area was occupied before Raukawa was born and Ngati Raukawa came into existence. The block is said to have been named after a tupuna, one of several named Kokako.

Before the mid-1500s the area was occupied by Ngati Kahupungapunga, a now vanished tribe whose origins are unknown. Their defeat and near extermination in the 16th Century saw the descendants of Raukawa take over and maintain their mana ever since, despite fierce inter-tribal fighting and other upheavals, particularly in the 19th Century.

Around 1880 a syndicate of land speculators, particularly Edwin Barnes Walker, William Louis Campbell Williams and John Wilson, began buying up land in the area. Premier George Grey's Government had tried to prevent private land purchases in the area in the 1870s. However this ended when the Government of Sir John Hall took over in 1879, opening up the landowners of the area to intense pressure from colonial and British speculators.

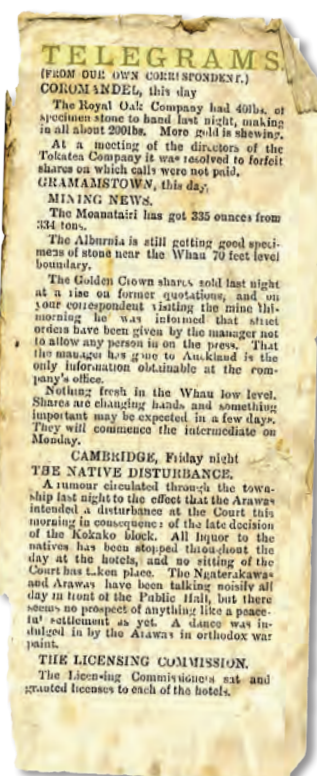
Local chiefs generally opposed any land sales, to government purchasing agents or private buyers, in line with King Movement policy. Many followed a policy of not appearing before Native Land Court hearings, in a bid

to prevent the issue of land titles that could lead to negotiations and potential sales. However many were forced into the Native Land Court to defend their ownership against claimants trying to take control of the lands to gain the right to sell.

The original title to the Kokako Block was issued on 19 June 1880, covering approximately 7,400 acres. The title was the result of Court hearings in Cambridge that determined ownership of a number of Maori land blocks in Patetere. The Kokako block hearing was probably the most controversial; court sittings had to be adjourned at one stage because of the depth of feeling involved, with loud arguments in the town streets between groups of Arawa and Raukawa claimants.

A second title, dated 16 February 1883 and covering 7,388 acres, records the transfer of the land to Walker, Williams and Wilson. This was followed quickly by the registration of two transfers. The first, of 1400 acres, was to Ngahaki te Kauru and 129 others. The remaining 5,988 acres was transferred at the same time to the New Zealand Thames Valley Land Company Ltd.

The background to these transfers was outlined by Judge H Carr in the Native



An 1880 newspaper report of the Kokako block hearing



Land Court at Rotorua in 1923, when the judge, with clerk/interpreter R Royal, began a hearing on 23 August to determine the relative interests of a group of applicants interested in the 1400-acre block.

In response to a question about whether the block was still native land, Judge Carr noted: “It appears that the original title is dated 19 June 1880. The whole area was sold to the representatives of the Thames Valley Land Company. The present area of 1400 acres, part of the original block, was granted back to the original owners for nominal consideration, a method then common: to acquire part, the whole was taken on the understanding that the part desired by the Natives was to be re-transferred back to them. The Court considers that the Native rights have not been extinguished as to the

1400 acres and it will proceed to determine the shares under the usual native takēs”.

One reason for transferring back parts of land purchases was that in many cases not all the owners were willing to sell.

A week later Judge Carr began hearing evidence to begin determining how ownership should be shared. The Judge noted: “Te Naera te Houkotuku, for Nikorima te Haunga and others: ‘I have searched the title. The elders divided the original block (as under)

<i>Ngati Wawau</i>	}	5545.1.30
<i>Ngati Ahuru</i>		
<i>Ngati Piere</i>		1121.3.27
<i>Ngati Maihi = Ngati Wawau</i>	}	500.0.0
<i>Ngati Tukorehe = Ngati Wawau</i>		

‘I ask on behalf of the claimants to apportion the shares in accordance with this division’.”



Representatives of various claimants than debated their relative rights, based on whakapapa and occupation. The fragile pages of court records recording this testimony set out descent, places of occupation, residence, food-gathering and burial in lengthy and fascinating insights into life in the area in times past.

Judge Carr then gave his judgement: "After hearing the evidence the Court has no hesitation in awarding this land to:

Ngati Wawau proper

Ngati Ahuru

Ngati Piere

Ngati Okotahi

Ngati Maihi = Ngati Wawau and

Ngati Tukorehe = Ngati Wawau

"Ngati Mutu have failed to prove their claim, after a very patient hearing."

The only remaining original Trustee, Huimai Makela, believes Ngati Wawau gained a stake in the block by virtue of the fact that Ahuru allowed Wawau to take refuge there after the latter was driven out of Waiariki by his Arawa cousins. She believes Ngati Ahuru have first claim on the land and any other groups have secondary claims.

The New Zealand Thames Valley Land Company Ltd, so called because it was made up not only of New Zealand (mostly Auckland-based) land speculators but also London interests who wanted to distinguish it from the Thames in Britain, hoped to establish a substantial town at Lichfield and advertised land for sale in Britain for farms. In order to attract settlers and raise the value of the land, the company promoters formed a railway company to build a line from

Owners, Trustees, staff and advisers gather near No 1 dairy unit after the planting of the last tree during the 2012 planting day

Thames to South Waikato and then over the Mamakus to Rotorua.

The depression of the 1890s intervened. The company failed. The line to Rotorua was eventually built by the Government, but it began from modern-day Putaruru, which sounded the death knell for Lichfield. A small spur line from Putaruru to Lichfield was built, but it always operated at a loss and was closed down. The Taupo Totara Timber Company bought the line and extended it to Mokai as a freight-only line.

The company's land, including most of the original Kokako Block, ended up in the hands of the Bank of New Zealand, the largest lender. The bank formed an Assets Realisation Board to work through the process of selling all the land it had acquired from a big range of speculators throughout New Zealand during the depression.

As a result, the rest of the block was sold and developed for farming during the first half of the 20th Century. The 1400-acre Maori land block appears to have languished over time, falling into disuse and apparently unoccupied, or at least not settled in any continuous way.

The early decades of the 20th Century were a time when Maori population numbers were recovering from the perilously low levels of the late 1800s, but extensive land losses and the beginning of the drift to urban living undermined the Maori way of life.

Huimai Makela says her father lived on Kokako with her older siblings, before she was born. From a house near the big tree beside what is now the No 2 dairy unit milking shed, her parents led a subsistence life, living off the land. They walked from Kokako to Katikati to visit her mother's family.

Others have also said there was a settlement on the raised flat land in that area, and there is a strongly held belief among some owners that the nearby stand of bush and adjoining land include a significant urupa. "People shouldn't go into that bush; it's tapu," said Huimai.

The long-serving farm manager, Bob Bigham, now retired and living in Putaruru, recalls digging up a sword close to the edge of the bush, while his son unearthed a carved

greenstone taonga nearby. Both were reburied in a more private location. He, along with Trustee Gloria Koia, has raised the possibility of a link between the sword and a story that a British soldier went missing on the block.

However by 1950 the remnant of Kokako Block seems to have been all but deserted. Its restoration was driven by the Matamata County Council, concerned that Kokako and several other Maori land blocks in the county were not paying rates and were harbouring large numbers of noxious weeds, in some cases poisonous to stock.

The County Council pushed the Department of Maori Affairs to establish development projects on these blocks, under the 1936 Maori Land Act, to bring them back into production. The Department gained written permission from 23 of the 28 surviving Kokako owners and put a case to Cabinet for funding to develop farms on the block. In November 1951 the Cabinet allocated £81,675, including £13,500 for livestock, for the Kokako Development Scheme. On 20 December 1951 the Government published an order in the NZ Gazette making the land subject to the provisions of Part 1 of the Maori Land Amendment Act 1936 for land development. Plans were begun to turn Kokako into six to eight dairy farms for lease, with preference to owners first, then iwi members, then any other Maori farmers. These plans were later modified and eventually dropped after the owners indicated they wanted to take back control of the land eventually.

Development proceeded, with clearing, fencing and planting of grass to turn the block into a sheep and cattle farm.

Once it knew that rates would be paid, the Matamata County Council developed the existing legal "paper" road that ran to the boundary and, by agreement with Maori Affairs, extended it through the block at a cost of £8000 to give vehicle access. By the beginning of the 1980s the farm was successful and had paid off the Government investment.

At that stage Kokako Trust was established as an Ahu Whenua Trust through the Maori



Land Court and the owners prepared to retake control of their land.

Huimai Makela says some of the owners started meeting at Norman Steele's home to get to know one another, then various owners nominated the first trustee candidates to the Maori Land Court, which appointed Trustees to the newly formed Kokako Trust.

"We were a bit naïve about managing land," said Huimai of those early days. But they had time to learn.

After a meeting of owners on 19 April 1980 agreement was reached to hand the land back to them. The Maori Land Court vested Kokako in six Trustees on 29 October 1980. They were: Norman Wilham Steele, Henry Simmonds, Tony Wiremu Karaka, Benjam Rangihorohoro Morrison, Huimai Makela and Sonny Mohi Ki Mohi. Sony Mohi resigned at the first Annual General Meeting on 18 November 1980 and was replaced by Jack Te Hou.

They met from time to time during the first two years, unpaid, at Norman Steele's home.

Once the land was handed over to the Trust they brought Keith Hinton on board and relied heavily on his advice, along with that of Noel Thomas, the Maori Affairs farm supervisor.

"That's why we're still here; Keith Hinton was marvellous," said Huimai Makela.

They took control of the farm from 1 July 1982, and on 7 July 1983 a Gazette Notice was published releasing the land from Part XXIV of the Māori Affairs Act 1953.

That was the beginning of today's successful Kokako Trust enterprise. 🌀

Trustees and staff during a farm inspection



CHAPTER 2

The People

The inhabitants of the area have fought a mixture of invaders and refugees for control of the lands for more than 400 years, at least since the climactic series of battles in about the mid-16th Century between Tainui peoples spreading south from Kawhia and the previous inhabitants, principally the tribe known as Ngati Kahupungapunga.

Raukawa, born near Okoroire according to most traditional stories in about the middle of the 15th Century, began the wider links by marrying an Arawa woman, Turongoihi. Their sons began the line that leads to the owners of the Kokako block.

Oral history about Kahupungapunga is conflicting. Some suggest they were not linked to any of the waka now listed as making the Great Migration from Hawaiki to establish the broad structure of Maori society in Aotearoa. Others have said they were of Arawa descent, possibly a tribe that had been driven out of the Bay of Plenty by their fellow iwi.

Whatever the case, it was with Te Arawa that the remnants of Ngati Kahupungapunga sought refuge after perhaps a century of generally peaceful co-existence ended in sustained warfare with the descendants of Raukawa, probably during the 16th Century.

Most stories say that Ngati Raukawa attacked Ngati Kahupungapunga to avenge the killing of a high-born Raukawa woman,

Korekore, who had married Parahore of Kahupungapunga. Raukawa sources say that Korekore was killed because she insisted on sending birds and other food to her Raukawa whanau.

Don Stafford in Te Arawa, says that Korekore insulted many of her husband's tribe by treating them as inferiors, and those she had insulted eventually persuaded Parahore to kill her.

On discovering this, her brother Whaita and his cousins Tamatehura, Wairangi, Upokoiti and Pipito, along with Tama te Whaua, launched a campaign against Ngati Kahupungapunga.

The defeat and near annihilation of Ngati Kahupungapunga left Ngati Raukawa in full control of the southern Waikato – Patetere – area, if they could hold it. Regular trade and intermarriage with surrounding iwi – cousins Ngati Maniapoto and the near neighbour tribes of the Arawa waka at Horohoro and around Lake Rotorua – often brought friction and insults, escalating into armed battles from time to time.

In the aftermath of the campaign against Ngati Kahupungapunga, Ngati Raukawa attacked Rotorua via the Patetere trail over the Mamakus, initially reaching the lake shore under the leadership of Whaita, before being driven back and eventually repulsed, with the loss of Pipito.



*Trustee
Huimai
Makela
during a farm
inspection*

In the main, the people of the area led fairly settled lives on lands that had been occupied by their whanau and hapu for generations. That was not to last into the 19th Century.

Some modern historians believe the arrival of the potato with Europeans vastly increased the ability of Maori to feed large numbers of warriors in the field for longer campaigns. Coupled with the importation of growing numbers of guns, this eventually produced what are now known as the Musket Wars.

About 1804 a large war party, said to have been 1000 strong, made up of Ngati Raukawa and Ngati Whakaue of Rotorua, successfully attacked Ngati Maniapoto. Then in 1807 Waikato and Ngati Whatua warriors defeated a combined force including Ngati Raukawa in the great battle near Ngaroto, followed closely by a return engagement in which Ngati Raukawa and Ngati Whakaue defeated Waikato.

Around the same time time Ngapuhi, the first iwi to get large numbers of guns and ammunition, headed south to settle old scores – generally regarded as the beginning of the Musket Wars of the 1820s-30s. Ngapuhi

began with a campaign against Ngati Whatua, leaving Tamaki largely depopulated for some years after many fled south into Waikato-Tainui lands.

In the early 1820s a combined Waikato and Ngati Maniapoto force drove Ngati Toa out of the Kawhia area, ending four decades of periodic warfare that had begun when Ngati Toa and Ngati Raukawa began a struggle with Waikato tribes for control of lands around Kawhia.

Ngati Toa migrated south to the Kapiti coast and invited their Raukawa relatives to join them. The resulting migrations established today's profile of Ngati Raukawa, with two distinct rohe.

Ngapuhi raids into Hauraki and Waikato in 1822 led to further upheavals, driving refugees south, disrupting traditional settlement patterns in Patetere and eventually bringing war to the area again. Many fled their lands and cultivations, hiding in caves in the Kaimais and the Mamakus. On their eventual return, some found newcomers occupying their traditional lands. More trouble ensued.

Increasingly from the 1830s new pressures developed as European settlers spread south over the Bombay Hills. Tainui established the King Movement in 1858 to resist pressure to sell their lands. Branded as rebels, they were invaded by British troops in 1863, beginning the Waikato part of the New Zealand land wars.

The war ended in Waikato with the defeat of Kingitanga forces at Orakau at the beginning of April 1864, and the declaration by the colonial Government, under the Land Settlement Act 1863, of a raupatu or confiscation line covering all land owned by King Movement followers north of a line between Raglan and Tauranga, except for some reserves and land that was returned to Maori who were not considered rebels. Complaints have continued since then that some of this returned land was awarded to Maori who were not the correct owners.

King Movement followers who were not prepared to submit to the colonial Government demands fled south, mainly into the district of their Ngati Maniapoto cousins but also into Raukawa lands south of the raupatu line, bringing further disruption and hardship to the Patetere area.

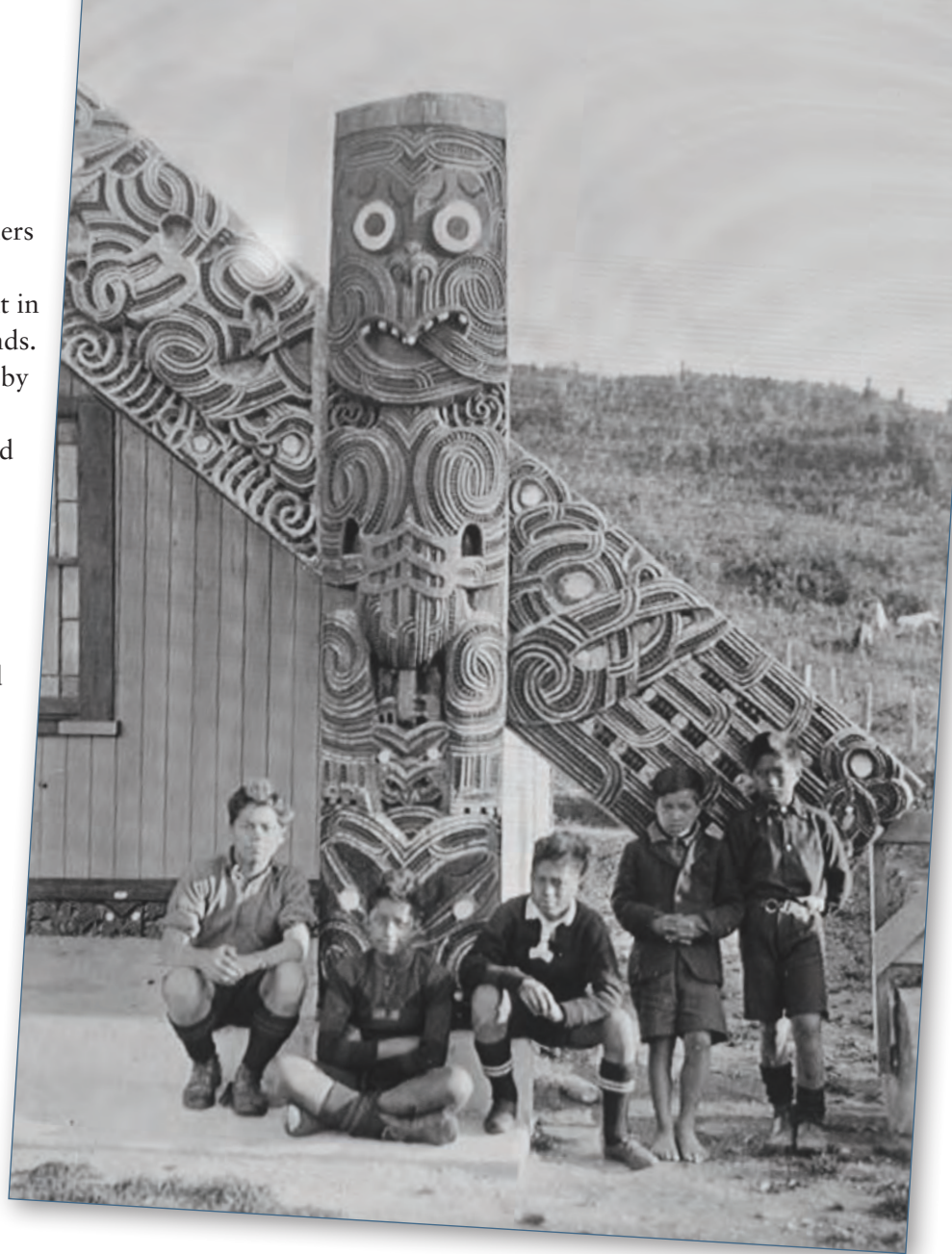
Active bitterness over raupatu continued until the early 1880s, but European settlers and speculators penetrated ever further south, often using “divide and conquer” methods to overcome resistance to land sales by working with small groups of owners or even those who had claims to ownership that were contestable at best. This forced rightful owners to have their land surveyed and go to court to defend their claims, leading to eventual sale under pressure as debts mounted for survey and court hearing costs.

The task of the speculators – as they were known even then – was made easier by the decades of upheavals that had disrupted settled ownership patterns in the area, with some communities virtually disappearing and

others re-forming into new groupings. Possibly the best evidence of this, and of longstanding earlier travel, trade and intermarriage, is the fact that eight marae are accepted as having significant whakapapa links to Kokako. They are Ngatira, Whakaaratamaiti, Tarukenga, Mangakaretu, Pikitu, Parawai, Paparamu and Hinerangi Okauia.

Native Land Court hearings in 1880 and 1923 determined ownership of the Kokako block, hearing evidence based on occupation and whakapapa from a number of claimants.

The first hearing, by Chief Judge F D Fenton, Judge J J Symonds and Assessor Hori Riwhi, began on 10 May 1880 and finished on 12 July after rowdy disputes in the streets of Cambridge between Tainui and Arawa claimants.



Left to right: Harry Waea, Pita Thompson, Harema Thompson, Tap Whare and Haki Thompson about 1930 at Te Tikanga a Tawhiao, Ngatira.

Photo taken by Albert Percy Godber. Godber, Albert Percy, 1875-1949. Collection of albums, prints & negatives. Ref: APG-1043-1/2-G. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand.



Paparamu Marae



Parawai Marae



Pikitu Marae



Tarukenga Marae

The Court awarded ownership of the Kokako Block to:

Ngahaki Te Kauru
Takarei Te Whanake
Mourea Tarakihi
Rakapa Hinehou
Ngahuariki Hinehou
Mihipeka Mourea
Hipihipi Te Rangipuiti
Whiripo Te Puni
Paora Pohoitahi
Mere Rangimatau
Kataraina Kahutaka
Perahiha Materoa
Arekatera Te Puni
Wikitoria Te Ataiti
Erena Raima
Tapita Kape
Tamihana Tarei
Pipi Ruihi
Arihia Wehipeihana
Tauī Tarawhati
Tahana Te Titoki
Ngawi Te Kahupohoi
Hare Ngawaituranga
Rutene Te Umanga
Ririata Manihera

Hipera Arama
Poutama Wanakore
Rana Hori
Maata Wanakore
Emeri Taupo
Heeni Arama
Eruera Te Uremutu
Akuhata Kiharoa
Retireti Tapihana
Ieni Turama
Perepe Te Koha
Rawiri Te Kakawaero
Te Rarangi Te Manuahura
Maihi Te Uata
Te Ia Punoke
Te Kere Te Hamaka
Parere Te Rirituku
Maopiu Kauia
Tuwhakara Punoke
Reihana Paruhi
Te Tapuke Kauia
Te Rangitapu Peina
Te Tuahu Reweti
Keremeia Hinekahu
Onepoto Timoko
Rika Wharerarauhe
Maihi Pahau

Tewi Huera
Raro Ngapapa
Hoani Tarahina
Moetu Tatarara
Ngaki Hamuera
Ngahauemaha Waitoa
Kereama Hone
Horoai Huirua
Mere Tamihana
Amohaere Te Amopiu
Moepouaka Te Kabukiwa
Te Wanihi Ngapu
Ropata Rangiwhakairi
Matiaha Topi
Parearohi Punoke
Paea Miriama
Maria Nepe Whio
Heperi Matiaha
Haimona Riria
Hoera Mahirahi
Ngawhona Riria
Hoera Mahirahi
Ngawhona Riria
Hoani Wikiriwhi
Maata Heperi
Paretia Pini
Atareta Haare



Whakaaratamaiti Marae



Hinerangi Okauia Marae



Ngatira Marae



Mangakaretu Marae

*Matiaha Rangiwhakairi
 Ani Tauehe
 Arapera Hare Hemi
 Mere Timiuha
 Menehira Pouawha
 Maihi Te Ngaru
 Eru Te Hauotu
 Nikorima Te Haunga
 Witarihana Rupuha
 Hori Kerei Huia
 Te Rehunga Te Ngaru
 Rini Putauaki
 Harawira Kakerangi
 Pia Pouawha
 Ana Warihi Te Ao
 Tamihana Te Hoia
 Rotohiko Haupapa
 Rangitaniwha Paeroa
 Niramona Pini
 Wenarata Pini
 Hiwinui Hori
 Piripi Hopo
 Te Aokahira Te Whitu
 Ngatai Winiata
 Eruana Te Wharau
 Te Aotiti Mare
 Nataria Te Aurei*

*Te Nuku Te Ngira
 Taekata Te Tokoihi
 Huhia Te Ranganui
 Hare Teimana
 Irimana Eru Wirimena
 Maihi Te Tua
 Hakaraia Te Ahiriwai
 Mata Te Tupara
 Hone Te Putu
 Henare Werahiko
 Te Waka Hakaraia
 Haereata Hoani
 Ingo Mihikorama
 Riria Kima
 Kima Te Uawhaki
 Ngapoti Heperi
 Te Koroua Moeakau
 Te Hingawaka Te Tupara
 Nganiho Turi
 Ngawhakapipipi Taua
 Himi Te Moataranui
 Rama Tata
 Meaha Pera
 Mita Te Tupara
 Miria Ngapoti
 Pipi Henere
 Ngahuia Maraea*

*Akaripa Te Waiwhero
 Katene Te Mapu
 Te Pere Te Una
 Hinekahukura
 Hiria Te Rau*

The Court decision established conclusively that Kokako is Raukawa land, though in fact many owners, then and now, live as members of other Tainui tribes, or principally as members of Arawa and even Mataatua tribes. However the 1880 and 1923 court decisions provide a clear basis for ownership through occupation and whakapapa, whether or not those decisions were correct in all details. When the land was formally handed back there were 530 registered owners of the 1400 shares. 🌀



CHAPTER 3

The Business

At handover, the Kokako farm was valued by Maori Affairs at \$1,406,247. This was made up of \$960,000 land value, improvements worth \$200,000, livestock valued at \$197,103 and chattels and other assets worth \$33,464. Debt was nil.

The first formal management committee appears to have been held on 21 March 1982, according to the minutes of the second meeting on 9 May 1982. The May meeting, held at the woolshed, was attended by: “Henry Simmonds (Chairman), Norm Steele, Jack Te Hou, Ben Morrison (Principal Trustees), Bob Bigham (manager for 27 years), Georgina Bigham, Noel Thomas, Charlie Haumaha, Colleen Simmonds, Niel Simmonds, Mere Simmonds, Mavis Walker and several children”.

The Trust had \$500 in the bank, less \$235 travel costs to pay. Niel Simmonds was appointed secretary, Keith Hinton the accountant and Ainsley McLachlan the solicitor. The Trustees agreed to take over the land from Maori Affairs on 1 July 1982, with a handing-over ceremony at Ngatira Marae on 21 August. The Trustees planned to raise a bank overdraft secured by the livestock to

get them through the first year, along with an expected credit of \$5000-\$6000 at handover.

Noel Thomas, the Maori Affairs field officer responsible for the farm, told the Trustees that some Kokako land was suitable to establish a dairy farm, and advised that the Trustees had fulfilled their obligations to the department and had demonstrated they could take over.

Subsequent monthly meetings were hosted by the Acting Chairman, Norm Steele, at his Sumner Street, Rotorua, home. He continued to host the meetings after Henry Simmonds returned to the chair in August.

Over this time they arranged an overdraft, received farm reports and finalised details of the handover ceremony. They drew up an extensive guest list, headed by Te Arikiniui Te Atairangikaahu and including politicians Peter Tapsell, Paul East and John Luxton, the chairs of Matamata County, the Wool Board and the Meat Board, and representatives of stock firms. The kai hakiri, starting at 3pm, would cater for 350 guests and owners.

The Trustees continued to run sheep and beef cattle on the farm, but began working to diversify from very early. On 5 September 1982 they received their first report on



forestry planting, with three-quarters of a 15-hectare area planted with *pinus radiata* and eucalyptus and plans to plant a further 2-3 hectares the following year.

A month later they received an initial report on establishing a dairy farm on the property. They decided to defer consideration for 12 months, but in fact considered a feasibility study for a dairy unit in June 1983.

In August 1983 they resolved to build a dairy unit at an estimated cost of more than \$1.6 million. They also resolved to hold a General Meeting at Ngatira Marae on 27 November 1983, but in fact the Trustees met again at

Norm Steele's house on that date. This time there were five Trustees, with Huimai Makela back on the management committee after serving as one of the original Trustees three years earlier. Huimai has remained a Trustee ever since.

In January 1984 the committee decided to hold the AGM on 5 May. A month later they postponed it for two weeks. On 19 May the first AGM of the working Trust was held at Ngatira, with 39 owners and Keith Hinton present. Rota Thomson was appointed a Trustee, the 1982-83 accounts were presented and the owners who attended received their



shares of the \$14,000 maiden dividend allocated by the committee.

They were already well advanced on the dairy unit project, having inspected two sheds in the Tirau area, awarded a contract for the building work and selected sharemilkers – Mr Taylor and his wife – who were reported in August to be very happy, with the cowshed completed and only a small delay in the electrical work.

At the end of October 1984 Norm Steele presented his resignation. When pressed by his fellow Trustees he declined to withdraw

it. The Trustees elected him a “life advisory Trustee”. There was one more meeting at his Rotorua home, following the Annual General Meeting, which everyone agreed had been a wonderful meeting.

A year later, in October 1985, the Trustees observed a minute of silence to note Norm’s passing. At the same meeting Henry Simmonds announced he would resign, effective after the next meeting, following a spell in hospital. He said he would nominate Te Wano Walters to become a Trustee at the next AGM.

Te Wano had been involved from the earliest meetings of owners, but had been unavailable for appointment initially due to business commitments.

The next meeting, in February 1986, saw Ben Morrison elected chairman unopposed, after Jack Te Hou declined nomination. Keith Hinton was appointed secretary of the Trust. A month later there were further changes. The Trust decided to end its relationship with Maori Affairs and appointed John Perrin as farm supervisor, a position that Perrin Ag has held ever since, with Trudy Laan eventually taking over John Perrin's advisory and supervisory roles. Over the following years John pushed hard to improve the performance of the farm, improving lambing percentages, reducing stock deaths and building up the performance of the No 1 and subsequent dairy units.

Also in 1986 the Trustees decided to seek owners' views at the AGM on making grants to Marae and for education, limited to tertiary education.

The Chairman's report at the AGM, held at Tarukenga Marae with 51 owners present, noted firstly the passing of Henry Simmonds, as well as a disappointing net loss of \$71,000 in a difficult farming year. This compared with a pre-tax profit of \$53,800 in 1984-85. No dividend was recommended, for the first time. However the Chairman noted that the dairy unit loan had been paid off, and John Perrin reported that Kokako was in a very strong position, well established, with low debt and the capacity to increase production to withstand the current farming downturn and take advantage of a future upturn.

The following year's AGM, also held at Tarukenga, in November 1987 presented a much better picture, with a pre-tax profit of \$137,400 and the value of the 1400 shares up to \$1552 each. A \$16,100 dividend (\$11.50 per share) was recommended.

Through the late 1980s and the 1990s the Kokako Trustees and John Perrin gradually improved the performance of the farm, recording profits in good years and very few losses, even in more difficult times.

In November 1990 the Trustees announced at the AGM at Paparamu Marae in Tirau

that the Kokako Trust Education Grant Fund had been established with initial capital of \$11,000 and would call for applications in 1991. The Fund had a short life, with the Trust maintaining education grants but dispensing with a separate fund within a few years after its formation. They preferred to use the capital for productive purposes on the farm and pay grants from the earnings, rather than setting aside capital for investment elsewhere.

Trustee Rota Thompson's passing in November 1991 was marked at the next Trustees' meeting, in January 1992.

The Trust continued to reduce debt and in 1992 began to consider establishing a second dairy unit. By the following year they were looking at several options – a second dairy unit, a bull beef unit, whether they should buy more land or convert existing land to a new use.

Profit climbed fairly steadily - \$105,685 in 1991-92, \$157,475 in 1992-93. Dividends and grants continued, with a one-off Kaumatua grant of \$100 to owners 65 and over agreed for the 1994 AGM.

Late in 1994 the Trustees decided to proceed with a second dairy unit, financed by a bank mortgage of \$500,000. That year farming took a dive. A wet winter, a "sudden and dramatic downturn in beef prices" and low dairy production combined to put the Trust under pressure. Westpac Bank agreed to tide over Kokako with a \$200,000 overdraft facility, but asked that the dividend payment for the year be suspended "as a commitment to the operation, given the additional requirement for funding". The Trust agreed. With a net loss of \$150,500 for the year it had little choice.

The following year saw an improvement. By January 1996 the new secretary, Murray Patchell, who had been appointed in August 1995 when the long-serving Keith Hinton retired, was instructed to write to Westpac Bank to reduce the overdraft facility to \$100,000. The Trust's production forestry holdings had risen to 33.5 hectares, and the No 2 dairy unit was established on 147 hectares, with No 1 on 100 hectares. But it wasn't all good news; Jack Te Hou was



admitted to hospital. The AGM in December at Ngatira Marae began with a minute of silence to mark his passing.

The following AGM, at Tarukenga with 88 owners and others, recorded a profit of \$147,179, the reinstatement of Kaumatua grants, 44 education grants of \$200 each, with 1202 owners on the share register, but addresses for only 382. The meeting saw the Trust's first strategic plan and discussed the dream of getting back the original 7000 hectare Kokako block, plus possible investment outside the farm and the possibility of working with other trusts.

In October 1998 the Trustees held a special meeting at Ben Morrison's home, where he advised them he had been diagnosed with terminal cancer. A month later they met there again, still under his chairmanship, and heard Murray Patchell report that Kokako measured up well in comparisons with other Maori Trusts for performance and dividends. John Perrin reported that Kokako's dairy unit was out-performing a basket of 26 Landcorp farms in key areas, including profit.

In December Te Wano Walters chaired the AGM at Whakaaratamaiti Marae, with 60 owners present. They received a \$35,000 dividend, \$100 kaumatua grants and 37 education grants of \$250 each. In discussion on the strategic plan, the priorities were identified as benefits to owners and co-operative ventures with other blocks in the area. Ben Morrison passed away on 13 January 1999, in the midst of the worst early summer drought for many years. Two months later a special meeting elected Gloria Koia as a Trustee.

It was a hard year. Milk fat production in the first three months was disastrous due to the drought, then rain brought severe facial eczema, increasing sheep deaths and reducing the lambing percentage.

In August of that year the trustees looked at growth options developed by John Perrin, ranging from continuing on the present path, buying a neighbouring 65-hectare block and developing a third dairy unit, or several kiwifruit growing possibilities. They opted for the third dairy unit.

Owners gather at the woolshed and prepare for the 2012 planting day



The millennium ended with the AGM at Mangakaretu on 4 December 1999, attended by 55 owners. As a special gesture there were kaumatua grants of \$100 for the over-60s, \$150 for the over-70s and \$250 for the over-80s. The dividend was \$25,000 and there were 61 education grants of \$164 each.

The following year's AGM, at Paparamu Marae, saw a change to the dividend policy. For the first time, dividends were paid directly into the bank accounts of owners for whom the trust had bank details, rather than by cheques written out on the spot to owners who queued for payment at the meeting. The dividend was again \$25,000, plus 57 \$180 education grants and \$100 kaumatua grants.

The year 2000 also saw the trust's long-serving solicitor, Ainsley McLachlan, step down, replaced by John Murray, and the signing of a share-milking contract with Alex and Helen Schweizer to run the No 2 unit. The Schweizers eventually took over

management of the No 1 unit as well and are credited with making a big difference to the farm's performance. They resigned at the end of the 2008-09 season to run their own farm, but sadly did not enjoy the fruits of their success. Alex Schweizer passed away suddenly and unexpectedly just months later.

From late 1999 until 2001 the Trustees were involved in complex and difficult negotiations to buy neighbouring land to allow the farm to expand. In September 1999 the Trust was the highest unsuccessful bidder for a block owned by Mr van Rooijen, which was passed in at a very public auction, filmed by TVNZ for a documentary.

The Trust went to \$850,000 but the owner wanted more than \$1 million. Negotiations dragged on till they reached agreement on about \$900,000 in February 2001. Then the larger Te Rere block came up for sale.

The Trust snapped that up for \$1.77 million, including stock and equipment, and moved





Ngatira Lands Trust and Kokako Trust representatives at Ngatira after the signing of the lease of the Whaiti Kuranui block

quickly to expand the No 1 dairy unit and establish No 3.

By May 2001 the trust was looking at record dairy results for the 2000-01 season, with work under way on the No 3 dairy unit so it could start in September.

The result, announced at the AGM at Putaruru Timber Museum before 48 owners on 1 December 2001, was a record profit of \$535,947. Dairy unit No 3 was established, the dry stock farm made a healthy profit and the Trust had purchased a 138-hectare property to expand the farm. The usual \$25,000 dividend was declared, along with kaumatua and education grants.

The 2002 AGM, again at the Putaruru Timber Museum, saw an even bigger profit of \$811,519 announced. The chairman told owners that the trust's focus was on repaying debt, following land purchases and a \$2 million investment in Fonterra shares to match the increased dairy production. Special mention was made of the trust's gratitude to dry stock unit manager Bob Bigham and his

wife Georgina, after Bob had given notice of his retirement during the year, ending 26 years of service on the farm.

But 2003 wasn't such a great year. The overdraft rose, and the high New Zealand dollar exchange rate affected dairy export values, but Kokako performed better than many other farms that year, despite a loss of \$569,577. The dividend stayed at \$25,000, despite pressure at the AGM to increase the payment to owners, kaumatua and education grants were paid, and there was a first annual marae grant, to Te Ruapeka, Tapapa, of \$1000.

A notable feature of the 2005 AGM, at Parawai, was a special kaumatua grant to long-time supporter Haki Thompson, marking his reaching the age of 90.

Through the middle years of the first decade of the new millennium the trust returned to profit and gradually reduced its debt. For several years it supported the new Te Arawa Future Farming Trust in developing young Maori farm trainees, before eventually deciding in 2008 to focus on its Raukawa links.



The end of the arrangement with the Future Farming Trust coincided with the burning down of the farm's shearers quarters, which had been used to accommodate trainees.

Following an initial suggestion by Trustee Jackie Aratema in 2004, the trust also instituted a trainee trustee programme to bring on board potential future trustees for two-year periods. After this was unanimously endorsed by the 47 owners at the 2006 AGM, Albert Ihaka and Andrew Thompson were appointed as the first trainee trustees.

The highlight of 2006 was the trust's entry in the Ahuwhenua Trophy and its success in reaching the finals. Kokako was widely publicised as one of the national leaders in dairy farming, setting a benchmark not only for Maori dairy farms. With the fairly recent addition of the No 3 unit, the trust was running 1200 cows on 400 hectares, producing 440,000 kilograms of milk solids in the judging year.

The celebratory high of 2006 was followed in the 2007-08 season by what John Perrin

described as the worst drought in 25 years in the district. Dairy production was slashed by up to 23%. The drought added urgency to discussions about leasing the 148-hectare Whaiti Kuranui block owned by the Ngatira Lands Trust to grow supplementary feed for the farm. By September 2008, a year after Joan Beckham first approached Kokako Trust on behalf of the Lands Trust, Kokako was paying rent on an initial three-year lease and developing the block to grow maize.

By the time of the 2008 AGM at Putaruru Timber Museum the trust had steadily reduced its overdraft, but debt still stood at around \$1.5 million. Wilfred O'Brien of Ngatira told the meeting that Kokako Trust had done a great job since being approached about the Ngatira land a year earlier. Perrin Ag had sorted out the water and fencing in three months.

The meeting also discussed the issue of shareholders in land blocks who could not whakapapa to the original owners. Jackie Aratema, who had researched the Maori



Land Court records, said nothing could be done to change those earlier decisions.

The trust struggled on through 2009. The exchange rate eroded the value of a 24% increase in the milk pay-out, to the extent that trustees discussed whether they should retain the No 3 dairy unit, and whether they should look at an alternative to supplying Fonterra. A fire at the No 2 unit didn't help. The two-year terms of the initial trainee trustees ended, and Airini Hepi and Veronica Haumaha were appointed in their place.

Despite the difficulties, the Trust paid a \$40,000 owners grant, which had replaced the dividend approach several years earlier. The grants, paid to identified owners whose

addresses were known, avoided the common problem of accumulating unpaid dividends that could not be used for other purposes, and ensured that owners of part shares received a reasonable minimum payment.

Early the following year, a Westpac Bank agricultural business manager told a trust meeting that during recent severe droughts Kokako's conservative approach had put the trust in a strong position, with its debt covered entirely by non-land assets.

At the same meeting the Trustees decided to add a fifth member to their board. The owners elected trainee Airini Hepi as a full trustee and Rachel O'Connor was appointed to replace her as a trainee trustee.



The Ngatira lease was working out for both parties, so it was extended to a 10-year term and the 8-hectare Roto block was added to the lease.

The Trust marked the end of the first decade of the new millennium with its 29th AGM at Whakaaratamaiti Marae December 2011, where it presented its new strategic plan to the 44 owners in attendance and declared owners grants of \$70,000, with a minimum \$75 per owner, plus kaumatua grants of \$250 each. Chairman Te Wano Walters told the meeting the future looked very bright for Kokako Trust.

John Perrin's view of Kokako is particularly relevant, given his years as a key adviser. He

believes the Trust's drive to continue buying surrounding land could offer particular benefits if the land remains in European title and can be used to raise further development funds. Maori owners are understandably reluctant to put whenua at risk of mortgage foreclosure, and therefore tend to grow more slowly than many of their European counterparts – though for the same reason they tend to carry less debt, making them financially better able to withstand severe drought and financial collapses and downturns.

A particular point in favour of the Trust, in John Perrin's opinion, is the commercial discipline it has exercised over the years by

*Planting day
2012 at the
farm*



*Preparing for
planting day
2012*

maintaining annual dividend payments to owners in good years and bad, with only two exceptions.

A feature of Kokako has been its relationships with its professional advisers whom Te Wano Walters calls his “young Turks”. Through Keith Hinton initially and later Murray Patchell, the Trust has worked closely with the same accountants throughout its 30 years in existence, as it has with Perrin Ag for 27 years. Patricia Kaisserian, nee Mitchell, looked after the finances of the Kokako block for 56 years, as well as being a shareholder in the block. She joined Maori Affairs on leaving school, in 1956 during the heyday of the department’s work on developing Maori land blocks in the region.

By the time Kokako was returned to the owners in 1980 Patricia was working for accountant Keith Hinton’s firm, later Hinton and Hulton and now Hulton Patchell. With the return of the land, the owners sought Keith Hinton’s help, and once again Patricia Kaisserian found herself looking after the book-keeping for the block, until her retirement in March 2012.

Today, 30 years after Kokako Trust and its owners regained control of their land, the

block and its farms, stock and equipment are valued at over \$20 million.

The strategic plan introduced at the 2011 AGM set a 10-year goal “to strive for high calibre farming that inspires and engenders pride into our owners and turns this success into growth and development”.

One of the plan’s aims is to ensure Kokako Trust is a “learning organisation”. This aim sits comfortably with its astonishing record of making many hundreds of education grants to assist the sons and daughters of owners with tertiary study over the past quarter of a century. 🍀



Celebrating 30 years
1982-2012

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