

# Maoritanga at Paraparaumu Public Library

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Although the human plea that we live in uncertain times, that our society is crumbling, has been repeated since the year dot, it appears to be supported by ample evidence as our country enters the last year of the seventies. The New Zealand economy is placing many stresses and strains on our society. Many people view with growing concern the outbreak of open warfare between Polynesian gangs, and the Maori urban guerilla warfare of Craig Harrison's *Broken October, New Zealand 1985*, a faint possibility in 1976 when the book was published, has the awesome ring of truth in 1979. Statistics point to the fact that a large proportion of Maoris leave school without any educational qualifications, that Maoris are disproportionately represented in New Zealand's penal institutions, that few enter the so-called 'professions' and that as the state of the national economy deteriorates, Maoris are the first, as unskilled workers, to lose their jobs. Volumes have already been written about the reasons for the failure of Maoris to make it in the Pakeha world, and perhaps librarians as a group could smugly disclaim any responsibility for this state of affairs. But apart from a few feeble book displays during Maori Language Week, what steps have New Zealand's public librarians been taking to make their libraries more inviting to Maoris?

I would like to show in this article that a public library can meet the needs of Maoris, that pakeha librarians can learn to identify and understand their needs, and that progress can only be achieved by rolling up your bibliographic sleeves, taking a public stand, and demonstrating that your public library has something to offer all New Zealanders.

### Wiki Mo Te Reo Maori O Kapiti

Maori Language Week, like many other weeks set aside on the New Zealand social calendar, is usually marked by pompous, grand-sounding speeches by politicians or public servants, and the uttering of a few Maori greetings on radio and television. For all the good it achieves, the week might as well not exist, for the simple reason that

language can only be picked up by daily use. We tried a rather different approach on the Golden Coast north of Wellington in September 1978. On the Sunday afternoon, to the greeting chant (powhiri) of the local Te Atiawa and Ngati Toa people, a large group of visitors from throughout the Horowhenua region was welcomed onto the marae established on the first floor of the Paraparaumu Public Library building. As Television One news cameras whirred, over 150 people took their respective positions, and an afternoon of speeches in both Maori and English got under way. The appropriate kawa or marae etiquette of the local people was followed to the letter, and each speech was followed by a waiata (song of lament) or action song. A special welcome was expressed to our guest speakers who included Mr Peter Boag, Assistant Director-General of Education, Professor Sid Mead of Victoria University (Professor of Maori Studies), and Mr Barry Hadfield, Mayor of Kapiti Borough and a direct descendant of Bishop Octavius Hadfield, a prominent man in the Horowhenua of the nineteenth century. The formal speeches were followed by a relaxed tour of the newly adorned library (described below), and an afternoon tea, which, in the Maori tradition, could only be described as sumptuous. The day finally drew to a close with the farewell speeches (poroporoaki) and, appropriately, a karakia or prayer.

The hui was a dramatic start not to a week of celebrations, but to an attempt at year-round recognition of the Maori element in New Zealand society. We did have special activities during that week — each day in the library, traditional Maori handcrafts were demonstrated, including poi making with both traditional and modern materials, tukutuku work, kowhaiwhai (rafter patterns) and kit-making. On two evenings, we presented films on many different aspects of Maoritanga, many of them from Michael King's *Tangata Whenua* television series. In each of the following months up to Christmas, a special film evening was held in the local Community Centre. But the whole point



of the Sunday hui (gathering) was to draw local attention to fundamental changes within the Public Library itself.

### Whare Whakamatau O Paraparaumu

The most eye-catching change to the casual visitor approaching the library building is the large sign along the front of the building, bearing the name of the library in both languages. Curiously, the Roman serif letters have a distinctly Maori feeling about them, akin to the host of Maori designs based on the unfurled fern frond. The Maori name of the Library is 'Whare Whakamatau O Paraparaumu', or house of the learning of knowledge in Paraparaumu, a rather appropriate title if you believe that libraries are more than just a collection of books. Inside the library building, all signs are expressed again in both languages, and just inside the main entrance, surrounded by a decorative strip bearing a kowhaiwhai or rafter pattern, is a special section set aside and stocked with a comprehensive collection of books on all aspects of Maoritanga (Maori culture). There are tukutuku panels on each of the columns marching the length of the library, and below each of these is a card giving the Maori name for the design (e.g. Niho taniwha) and an explanation of what it signifies. The signs in Maori are an education for both Maori and non-Maori library users — those familiar with the language have a chuckle, and newcomers can be seen at times quietly trying to get their tongues around the Maori equivalent. The library staff were bemused by the sign for 'Staff only' — 'Kai Mahi Anake'. The Kai Mahi are the workers in the kitchen, and it is hard to resist the pun that the library staff are putting down a hangi of food for thought. A set of posters, published by the Post Office Savings Bank, depicting Maori games, warfare, fishing and agricultural techniques, moko, etc., adds a further distinctive note to the interior of the building.

### Nga Pukapuka Maori

The special collection of books in the Maoritanga section was especially strengthened to cover as many areas as possible. History, biography, economics, culture, pre-European ways of life, modern Maori urban life, handcrafts and traditional arts, kawa (protocol or custom) are all well represented, and a special effort was made to build up our strength in Maori language. We have dictionaries, basic textbooks (e.g. *Te Rangatahi* series), basic readers (*Te Tautoko* and *Te*

*Wharekura* series, published by the Department of Education), and several copies of each of the titles in the elementary Price Milburn *Pukapuka Ihi* series. We have most of the Elsdon Best titles, including the recent reprinted series of Dominion Museum monographs, and we are continually adding new titles on all aspects as they become available. (NZNB and ANB are first-rate acquisition tools in this area). The Capper reprint series has been a particularly fruitful source of material on pre-European and nineteenth-century Maori history. Waikato University's Centre for Maori Studies and Research has presented us with a number of their research papers, and all sorts of interesting pamphlets and soft-cover monographs seen to be appearing spontaneously in our mail, most of which fill gaps in our collection. One of our most pleasing recent acquisitions was a 3-volume set of *Nga Moteatea*, waiata of the various Maori tribes collected by Sir Apirana Ngata, and a long-playing record featuring many of the waiata, sung by an expert in this field. In cataloguing this collection, we used Maori and English subject headings.

### Pewhea? Getting Things Going

One of the basic rules for the public librarian keen to do any of the above is never to go it alone. There are resources in any community which can be tapped to the benefit of all concerned. While it is desirable to meet the needs of groups of people in the community with special needs, it should not, and need not, be at the expense of the majority of regular library users, who already have the reading habit. Moreover, the local authority can hardly be blamed for feeling a little upset about a large proportion of library funds being spent on a small section of the community.

In our case, most of the resources required to give our library a bi-cultural ethos, and to stage the hui, came from outside groups and individuals. The kowhaiwhai strips and tukutuku panels were made by the Maori Studies students of Otaki College. The space for the hui was provided at no charge by the management of Coastlands Shoppingtown. The shrubs and ornamental plants were lent to us by the local gardening shop. The forms to sit on came from the local marae (Whakarongotai) and the seats from the Borough's new Community Centre. One of the local primary schools which uses our library on a regular basis made their projector available for the film evenings. The *Kapiti Observer*, with whom we have a



very good working relationship, gave the hui and the library first-rate coverage during Maori Language Week, and subsequently, at no charge. The Golden Coast WEA co-sponsored advertising costs, and paid for the hire of the Community Centre for the series of films evenings. Since our library belongs to the National Film Library, we had ready access to a very good selection of films on Maoritanga. The membership fee must be one of the best investments available, when you consider that the only restriction on the number of films borrowed is the ability of the Film Library to cope with demand. The local Maori communities are the greatest reliable source when it comes to such an undertaking as a hui. They are quantity caterers *par excellence*, and without the slightest hint of fuss or panic the most mouth-watering repast seems to appear from nowhere. The secret of their success is co-operation — trucks, seats, forms and all manner of equipment are conjured up by an informal but well-practised network of contacts. Each of the local marae has its team of workers with different skills, and whatever the occasion, tangihanga or hui, they move into action automatically. The only expenses paid out of library funds were the painting of the library sign by a professional signwriter, the purchase of the bookstock, and the making of the subject area

signs, the last of which were done with pens, stencils and cardboard already purchased for general library use.

The public librarian may well ask — but how do I make contact with these people? How do I convince them that I am not just another free-loader riding on their backs, and accepting the credit for the result? The answer, in my experience, is to become involved in as many aspects of marae life as possible. I was very fortunate in being able to attend with one of our Borough Councillors, who is herself of the Ngati Raukawa of Otaki, a daytime adult Maori language class at Otaki College. Our teacher is Mr Hiko Hohepa, of Ngati Arawa, a man of tremendous knowledge of all aspects of Maoritanga, especially of marae etiquette (kawa) of the various tribes, and a very humble man at that. His classes were more often than not held in the best Maori classroom ever designed — the marae. We regularly went to hui and tangihanga, where the men were encouraged to deliver whaikorero (speeches), and the women gained much confidence in giving the karanga, the wailing cry which precedes movement onto any marae. There was a regular visiting by groups from Wellington Polytechnic, Wellington Teachers' College and many other educational concerns. We learnt many waiata and karakia





(prayers) and eventually developed an almost instinctive awareness of what was expected of us in a marae situation. This sort of requisite knowledge cannot be learned from books. Because I was interested, the local people gave me their full support, and I have made many friends in the process. There is a spiritual dimension to understanding Maoritanga, and it requires a person who is prepared to reach for understanding. It has nothing to do with putting up a few fancy pictures for one week of the year. The language is only a part of the whole, however, and enterprising public librarians should acquaint themselves with all aspects of Maoritanga.

### **Na te aha? Why?**

Although the staging of a hui and subsequent Maori events is a shared enterprise, the librarian contemplating such an undertaking should be prepared for a lot of work. The sending out of invitations alone is a mammoth task requiring discretion, particularly to ensure that all local dignitaries, especially Maori, are properly invited to take their appropriate place on the library marae. The librarians involved should clarify in their own minds the reasons for investing a lot of time and effort into such a move.

My involvement grew out of my general interest in Maori-tanga, and specifically from my involvement in Maori language classes. After some time, I could understand why Maoris were not motivated to use our library. The education system itself has left many Maoris with a sense of failure. The public library as a structure makes no concession to Maori values at all — hence our installation of kowhaiwhai and tukutuku panels. Moreover, public libraries in general seem to be hung up on the idea that they should cater for the 'average bloke' with different kinds of media, but not to meet needs which are in fact quite different. Our library is trying to meet special Maori interests, reflected in a growing interest in their language, origins and values. Our Maoritanga bookstock is being used for the compiling of family genealogies (whakapapa), as a source of information on the tribe's canoe and its history, as a resource centre for waiata. Specifically, I am trying to work in line with 'Whakatapuranga Rua Mano' ('Generation 2000'), an innovative programme of Maori consciousness-raising, being developed by the Raukawa Marae trustees, and involving in all sorts of seminars and events the Ngati Raukawa, Ngati Toa and Te Atiawa people

of the Horowhenua. Some startling and brilliant guidelines have come out of this movement, including proposals for a Centre of Learning in Otaki (with a research librarian developing collections of taped waiata, historical books and items related to those peoples), a secretariat to keep the people informed of legislation and other matters affecting them, health surveys and programmes, the preservation of land, Maori language programmes, an academy of performing arts and so on. On the other hand, many New Zealanders of European descent are genuinely interested in Maori beliefs and values, and the library is now serving their needs too. On a more subtle level, members of the public in general are being exposed to Maori language and handcrafts each time they come into the library. A language is most easily learnt when it becomes part of the everyday environment.

One of the most remarkable features of the changes in the library has been the full support given by the Kapiti Borough Council, the local authority responsible for the library. It must be an innovation for a local authority to become involved at an official level in the promotion of the Maori language and Maori values in general. The Mayor, Mr Barry Hadfield, was one of the guest speakers, and several of the Councillors on the Community Services Committee attended in person. I would recommend to any librarian contemplating a similar programme to go for the support of the local authority involved. It not only adds official prestige to the enterprise — it also opens up many resources, such as public halls, community centres, parks, crockery and cutlery, seating, trestles and so on.

### **Ka Huri**

To sum up, public librarians have a responsibility, in my view, to cater more effectively for the interests of Maori New Zealanders. It is about time that we admit that they exist, that they have a cultural and conceptual approach to life which differs significantly from that of the European. The librarian is required to develop new skills, a new way of looking at things and not sentimentally, in order to cater for their needs. This is by no means a one-sided process. You learn on the way a much more graceful alternative to the rat-race approach to life, and the value of overtly warm, human relationships, 'Kei te kamakama te tikanga' — It is indeed a proper thing to be joyful, and full of high spirits.