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Kaumatua was William Porter.

In 1907 Porter wrote another reminiscence now published as **Recollections of a Voyage to South Australia and New Zealand Commenced in 1838, Recorded at Huntly in 1907 by William Porter**. Editors Miranda Law and Garry Law 2007 96pp - illustrated - soft covers - ISBN: 0-476-01579-0

Reminiscences of Auckland in 1841 and 1842

(By Kaumatua)

I arrived in Auckland with my parents in June 1841. The town was still largely composed of tents or raupo huts. We remained on the vessel, which was my father's until a house or store could be built, which was principally done by the carpenter and the ship's crew, most of the materials having been brought with us.

A Marriage

Shortly after our arrival a ball and a supper was given at Government House on the 24th of June to celebrate the marriage of Mr James Coates¹ and Miss Bental. We received invitations to attend and the ladies² were anxious to be present, having known Miss Bental in Sydney. It being very wet at the time the large boat was covered with a tarpaulin, and a sedan chair being extemporised and covered with an oilcloth, a start was made about eight. We landed at about highwater somewhere near where the Admiralty House now stands. At that time there were no roads – only a steep track up the hill to Captain Rough's house. The four sailors, after a hard struggle, got to the top with one of the ladies, the gentlemen with lanterns leading the way. After two trips we got all safe to Government House, and the sailors were well taken care of in the kitchen till it was time to return. Getting back was more difficult as the tide had gone out, and there was a long mudflat, so that they had to go on to what was then called Soldier's Point.

At last the vessel was reached about 4 a.m., and all enjoyed the first ball in Auckland. Out of all that attended I think only three or four survive, Captain D. Rough in England, Mr J.P. Du Moulin³, and Dr J. L. Campbell; there might be others but I do not remember. A supper was no light matter in those days. Fowls 12s per pair, eggs 6s a dozen.

The First Stone Building

The first stone building in Auckland was the barracks that were built on Point Britomart. The entire labour was performed by the soldiers themselves, for which extra duty they received an addition to

¹ Private Secretary to Governor William Hobson and was subsequently Clerk of the House of Representatives. He died in 1854.

² Presumably William's mother and sister.

³ An officer in the commissariat corps.

their pay. The men were under the direction of Mr George Graham, still alive in England. In the first building there was room for fifty men, and the walls were loop-holed. There was a deep ditch and a high bank across the point with strong gates and guard-house, notwithstanding which some men found a way to get out at night down what was called Jacob's Ladder. The point was perpendicular, but at one place there was a pohutukawa tree, the roots of which went nearly down to the beach, and by that way they got out.

Landing Goods

At the opposite side of the bay was another point called Smale's Point. Captain D. Smale had arrived in the ship Chelydra, of which he was part owner and built a house and store on top, about where Albert-street now stands. There was deep water there at high water. He erected a derrick and winch to hoist the goods out of the boats. His wife was taken up by the same means in a chair, as there was no good road to get there. The landing of goods was no by no means easy, and it was mostly done by ships' boats or punts. But soon fine boats were built of about 10 tons burden, very flat on the floor with mainsail and one large jib, decked over as far as the mast. They were very handy and answered well. They ran onto the beach when the tide was in, and as soon as it left carts backed to and discharged the cargo. This would hardly do in the present day. One of the first to start these boats was Charley Robinson, well known in Auckland, and not long since dead. He did so well that a few years later he had the well-known cutter Henry built by Mr H Nichol⁴, a boat that is hard to beat at the present day, although nearly 40 years old. Being a good hand with cattle he was principally employed in shipping to the islands of the gulf and to the Thames. Many a pleasant trip I have had with him, and enjoyed the steak cooked over the usual nail-can fire.

St Paul's Church

A meeting was held at Government House on April 14 1841, to take steps for the erection of a church. By an Act of Council £300 had to be subscribed for and the aid of Her Majesty's Government could be applied for. By September 11, 1841 £460 had been subscribed and the building commenced, Mr. W. Mason being the architect. Funds must have run short, as it was not plastered inside nor the tower finished for some time after, and a number of the congregation found their own seats⁵. When the walls were half way up, it was a favourite amusement of my companions and myself, after the workmen had left to run races round on top, jumping over the spaces left for windows, to the great risk of our own necks and damage to the work. At that time Mr Mason's son was found drowned in a hole that had been made to catch the rain water to use in the works. A man afterwards hung for another murder confessed to throwing him in out of revenge for being found fault with. I saw the foundation stone laid, with a bottle with coins and papers put under it. When the old church was pulled down I believe the bottle was found broken and the coins gone; the stone must have been lifted and the money taken. During the Heke war in 1845, when the Maoris were expected to attack Auckland the windows were partly blocked up with heavy timber and loopholed,

⁴ Henry Niccol started boat-building in Freemans Bay in 1842.

⁵ Presumably the subscribers were allocated seats, perhaps in stall pews which were in fashion in Georgian churches but were often replaced by row pews in Victorian times.

the doors were made of strong plank, bullet-proof. Before the church was built service was performed in a raupo house, about where the Museum now stands⁶.

A Native Scare

Towards the end of 1841 there was a scare from the natives. I think the trouble arose out of a Maori stealing a cloth cap out of a shop. He was arrested; next day a large body of natives landed on the beach in front of Mr. W. S. Graham's store in Fort⁷, the water then came right up to the road. They danced a war dance, making the ground shake as they all jumped up and came down together. Armed with muskets and tomahawks, with little on but feathers in the hair and a cartridge box, with eyes turned up and tongues hanging out, they were not a pleasant sight⁸, as anyone who has seen a real war dance in the good old style must know. There were few troops in Auckland then, only about 40 of the 80th Regiment. Special constables were sworn in, and the town was in a ferment. If I remember right, they marched up to the Courthouse and took the man away. It was afterwards settled by a payment to the storekeeper.

Courthouse and Gaol

The Courthouse and gaol were then at the junction of Victoria and Queen-street on the west side; the hill in front was all fern and scrub. Willie Hobson, the Governor's son, and myself often went down and got Mr McElwain, the gaoler, to let us in to see Maketu, a young Maori, who was convicted of murdering his wife and her two children at the Bay⁹. He had amused himself by covering the walls of his cell with drawings of canoes, men and horses. He was the first man to be hanged in Auckland and buried in the gaol yard. In front of the Courthouse were a pair of stocks. It was a common sight to see one or two men sitting with their feet in them¹⁰. The seat was about a foot from the ground, and the stocks higher, and as there was no back to the seat the position was not comfortable. It was a trick of some to inveigle unsuspecting persons "just to try it you know," then close the top beam and leave the victim. As not many people went that far up it might be some time before he got his release. Just fancy stocks in that place now.

Governor Hobson

The sudden death of Governor Hobson in his 49th year is one of the events I particularly remember. Although he had been unwell for some time the end was not thought to be so near. A wrong medicine having been administered in lieu of what he had been accustomed to take, his constitution

⁶ That is its former site in Princes Street.

⁷ Fort Street – though at the time it was not called that as the Point Britomart fort had not been built. The first name of the street was Fore Street.

⁸ The writer was aged 11 at the time – one wonders if he would have been free to see this.

⁹ Bay of Islands, at Motuarohia. He had killed two European adults and three children none of whom were related to him.

¹⁰ A picture of the courthouse and stocks can be seen here: <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/political-values/3/2>

received a shock from which it never recovered. He was greatly respected, and all that could attend the internment, and every person in the town of Auckland appeared in the deepest mourning. The Maoris attended in large numbers, every man with a musket, the women with wreaths of clematis in their hair¹¹. The remains were buried in a brick vault by the Rev. J. F. Churton. At that time the cemetery grounds were quite in the country at the top of what was called the white road, now Symonds–street. The coffin covered in a Union Jack, with a cocked hat and sword upon it, was carried by the sailors from the Government Brig Victoria. There was a small party of the 80th Regiment commanded by Captain Best, and also a band. It was the first military funeral in Auckland. The chief mourner was William Hobson¹², only son of the Governor, who afterwards distinguished himself in command of a boat party in the search for Sir John Franklin. I think he is now dead. The Maoris brought up the rear of the procession, and after a military salute had been fired their demonstrations were rather noisy, firing off their muskets and howling in chorus.

Postal Business

The postal arrangements at this time were none of the best. The business was carried on in a small box of four foot square, often with the confusion of the police office in the adjoining room. Auckland was thought to have a great advance when a small cart was started to Onehunga for the conveyance of letters and passengers. It left once a week from Woods Royal Hotel, where the Northern Club now stands. It was timed so as to arrive at Onehunga at high water to join the ferry-boat that plied to Karangahape, the Manukau Company's settlement. This conveyance started in November 1841.

The First Races

The first horse races took place at Epsom in the second week of November 1841. The first race, Handicap Steeplechase 2sovs each¹³; second, Auckland Cup, all ages, 2yrs 7st, 3yrs 10st¹⁴, 2sovs entrance, half forfeit; third Ladies Purse, with 5sovs added from race fund, one mile heats. The late Mr William Young, then collector of Customs, was one of the most active in getting up the races.

¹¹ Hobson died 10 September 1842 so the spring flowering of native clematis is apposite.

¹² William Robert Hobson 1831-1880. The Franklin search party he led travelled by sled.

<http://pubs.aina.ucalgary.ca/arctic/Arctic39-2-184.pdf>

¹³ Stet – presumably two sovereigns entrance fee.

¹⁴ 7 stone weight limit on 2 year old horses