

From the NZ Herald 1907 (month and day not known)

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

ST. JOHN'S COLLEGE IN THE FORTIES¹.

BY KAUMATUA

The death of Archdeacon Samuel Williams² recalls to my mind the early days of St. John's College, and I am one of the very few left that were there in the early forties.

When the college was removed from Waimate to Auckland in 1845 the first buildings were erected close to the Purewa Creek, below the present cemetery. Nearest to the creek was a large building built in the old English style with a heavy framework outside with upright boarding inside, old-fashioned diamond panes in the windows set in lead. This building was afterwards moved to the present site of St. John's, and was used as a barn, but had to be weatherboarded as had other houses that were built in the same way. I think one of the old houses was moved, and is now doing duty as a kindergarten school, at the corner of Remuera and Arney Roads.

The school building at Purewa was divided into two parts, for the upper and lower schools, and one corner in each part partitioned off for the masters. They were quite small cribs. Stairs led up to the lofts where the dormitories were. Under the stairs a shelf was fixed, on which stood two tin basins and a tin can for the use of the boys. The water had to be fetched from the creek, and the boy that got the water over night was entitled to first wash, no slight privilege. The upstairs rooms were cold, the wind blowing under the eaves, as the building was not lined.

Each boy had a kind of bunk with a hood to keep the cold off his head. There were battens at the bottom; no spring mattresses in those days. The house was without a chimney, and in winter the rooms were very cold. The two lower rooms were schools.

The Rev. W. Cotton (of bee fame³) was headmaster. He was also Bishop Selwyn's chaplain. The master of the upper school was Mr. Tudor, afterwards ordained and stationed at Nelson. The late T. B. Hutton was master of the lower school. He was ordained, and went to the Bay of Islands. There were eight students for orders, and I think Canon Gould is the only one left. Archdeacon

¹ This was the second article in the Herald by Kaumatua. The earlier dealt with Auckland in 1841.

² Dictionary of NZ Biography <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/1w25/1> died 1907.

³ Rev Cotton published on beekeeping: "Hints on the Management of Bees" New Zealand Spectator 27 February 1847 and subsequent issues. From these it is clear he was keeping bees at St Johns.

Williams had charge of the Maori Boys' School, and was ordained about this time. There were twelve or thirteen in the upper school. I think Bishop L. Williams⁴, of Waiapu, and one other are the only ones alive. There were about thirty in the lower school. I think there are five or six still in the land of the living. Captain Nelson Hector, late of the P. and O, now of the R.N.R., is in England, and still, I think, hale and hearty, although nearly eighty. He was in Auckland a few years ago.

Further up the rise, above the school building, were a row of cottages, built by the Maoris, of raupo and thatched. They were floored with boards and some of them had brick chimneys. These were occupied by Mr. Cotton, the students, and employees. Further up still was the hall, where the meals were served in one large room, with long table and benches. The masters, students, and scholars all took their meals together, which were plain and never varied. For breakfast and tea one thick round of bread and a cup of tea with milk. The sugar was very dark, from Mauritius; it is never seen now. At times we were without, as it was both scarce and dear. The loaves of bread were cut into thick slices, and the great point was to get the top or bottom slice, as they were thickest. For dinner it was pork and potatoes, sometimes also pumpkin; no puddings. How would the present schoolboy like that fare? Still we were well and strong. The man who acted as steward was a Scotchman who had been in the army. He served out the meals, and was very stern. If a boy asked in a whisper for a little more tea sometimes he would give it, but oftener he would stand with his back to the fireplace and take not the slightest notice. He was a character.

Our great treat was to club together for a supper; we would get the wife of one of the employees to cook it for us—sometimes eel pie, sometimes only boiled rice, but always coffee. This same old lady who did our private cooking, also attended to the dormitories; she is long since dead, but her children and grandchildren are about Auckland, and may read this. The lighting arrangements were very bad—two candles for each room, and holders turned out of wood. Some were carved out of plaster of Paris, of which there was a keg. There were no lamps of any kind. Mr. Cotton had a fine lathe and was an expert in the use of it. It afforded great pleasure to many of us. The headmaster was very popular with all. He took part in all sports, was a good cricketer, and pulled a good oar. Cricket, rounders⁵, quoits, and hockey were the games. Football was never played. If two boys quarrelled Mr. Cotton would take out his watch and time the rounds; let them fight it out properly. Once or twice he gave everybody a bright new shilling that had never been in circulation. The idea got about that his father was a banker, and I believe with some truth. One of his hobbies was to construct a dam for bathing; it was not a great success. Two spars were put across a creek, one near the bottom, timber was driven up and down, then clay wheeled in, and a race cut out of the bank at one side, with a floodgate. It was washed away more than once.

There was a high stage that the boys were expected to jump off head first. As an inducement to bathe, those boys who turned out for early bath got coffee, and the ones that would not bathe

⁴ Williams, William Leonard, 1829–1916 Missionary, linguist, Bishop of Waiapu.

⁵ British version of softball

were thrown in with their clothes on. I remember one case in particular. A boy refused to go in. Mr. Cotton was in the bath. He came out as the fellow was about to get a ducking, being swung by feet and hands. "Hold on" he said "Wait till I get my glasses and can see the fun!" He had a fine whaleboat and a picked crew. The present Bishop of Waiapu was one of them.

They were all dressed alike: it was only a striped twill shirt overall with badge on the arm. They would pull at racing speed across Hobson Bay to Taurarua (Judge's Bay), where the bishop and family then lived with Judge Martin. Then perhaps they would go on to Auckland for the mail and get back before the tide left the creek. Mr. Cotton had a Timor pony⁶. He would take a boy up behind him saying, "hold on, my lad," and go of full gallop till the boy wished he was not there. He could use the cane well when occasion required: still all the boys loved him. He was a very able preacher.

Everybody's time was taken up after school hours, some printing, some in the carpenter's shop, others road-making or getting firewood. I remember on one occasion a master called out, "leave off work and carry bricks from the creek." Most of the communication to Auckland was by water. There was a team, of working bullocks and dray but at times the road (if it could be called a road) was very bad. Sometimes a day would be proclaimed a working holiday, and we were marched with spades, hoes and other tools up to the present site of St John's, planting trees, forming paths, building an apiary, according to the order of the day.

At this time the stone building was in course of erection. The move into it took place in 1847. It was quite rough, not plastered or limed. In heavy rain I have seen water trickling though the porous stone. Some difficulty was experienced with the foundation at the west end; a run of water undermined it and there was danger of a collapse. Drains had to be cut and excavations made, and a strong stone arch built under the foundation-which made it secure. There was a large stone kitchen detached with a fireplace that took up most of one end; in this all had their meals. The bishop and party sat at a separate table, but partook of the same fare. A very long Latin grace was chanted before and after meals. At this time the bishop and his family moved from Taurarua into one end of the stone building. The dormitories were again in the attic. There were no windows, but a wooden shutter in the roof could be pushed open to give light and air. The floor of the lower storey was of flag stones. There were chimneys in this building, so that made it better in winter. The pretty little chapel was built, varnished inside and out. Mr. T. B. Hutton did a lot of carvings for it. I suppose they are still there. Other houses were put up in the same style, with steep roofs and small diamond panes in windows. All were varnished and looked very well.

The farm buildings were on the south side of the road. Farming operations were carried on to some extent under the able management of Mr. Parris, who died at New Plymouth not very long ago. At the time the late Dr. Purchas joined the college, a house was set apart for a hospital. A patient

⁶ Timor ponies were particularly favoured in Australia as they were thought to handle hot climates better than European breeds.

from East Tamaki was admitted for treatment. It turned out to be an infectious fever, and a great number took it, and there were several deaths. Sydney Williams, brother to Bishop L. Williams, was one of the victims, and Bishop Selwyn's three children were very bad. The eldest son, William, was at one time not expected to recover, and the youngest, a little girl, died; also two or three of the Maori boys. They are all buried in the graveyard at St. John's.

In this year the bishop was most of his time at the college teaching and directing. He was to be seen everywhere, and at all times. He was indeed, the man for the times — thought nothing of starting off overland to Wellington with perhaps two or three Maoris, over very bad tracks. On one of these journeys he was accompanied by the Bishop of Newcastle, N.S.W. Coming to a river the bishop said, "Now Newcastle, off with your breeks, follow your leader, and come across." He was, indeed a leader of men. I shall never forget the last sermon I heard him preach. It was on "Charity," in the year 1866, on board the sloop of war *Brisk*⁷, Captain Hope. She had been for some time in the Waiheke Channel getting spars from the island. The bishop came from Auckland in quite a small boat to have service on board. He never studied his own comfort in any way. It was a great loss when he left New Zealand. We shall never see his like again.

Well, the old stone building stands and will for years, but the first that occupied it are nearly all gone, after just sixty years. A new generation have taken their place, under different conditions in every way.

Before the college chapel was built the people from St. John's attended at St. Thomas', West Tamaki. It is about one mile from the, college. This church was built by the settlers in 1843. Some gave labour, some teams of bullocks to draw the stone, and some contributed money. There were not many settlers at West Tamaki in that year. Shells were burnt on the beach near for lime, but it was not very good. The building was intended to be the chancel of a future church, which, however, was never required. Some of the very early settlers are buried in the ground attached. The old church is a ruin, now covered with ivy, and roof falling in. Mr. Richard Baber, of Remuera, is, I think, still alive. He was one of the first to settle at Tamaki West, and attended at the old church from the first.

At the time of the war in the North, called the Heke war, the church was fortified as a place of refuge in case of a Maori raid, which was daily expected. A strong door was fitted, made bullet-proof, and loop-holed, and the windows were boarded up half-way, also loop-holed. The settlers gathered twice a week to be taught the use of arms; some of them had never handled a gun. I saw one man hide in a ditch when the arms were served out; he was just out from England. The guns were of all ages, many with flint locks. There were old pistols, powder horns, and bullet pouches. I spent some time casting bullets - out of scraps of lead. There was never occasion to take refuge in the church, but at the time the danger was very real there were such a large number

⁷ **HMS *Brisk*** was a 14-gun wooden-hulled screw sloop of the Royal Navy, launched on 2 June 1851 from Woolwich Dockyard. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HMS_Brisk_\(1851\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HMS_Brisk_(1851))

of natives about; and so few Europeans, and only 40 or 50 regular soldiers in Auckland.

The people of the present day have no idea of the conditions under which the settlers lived.

In the Porter family papers is this picture:



Written on the reverse is the following:

“This photograph was taken from a painting by Mr S Stewart of Auckland, artist from a sketch made by Mr W F Porter – in the year 1846 in the month of June, It represents the first St Johns College founded by Bishop Selwyn. The artist verified the sketch by a visit to the old site in company with Mr W F Porter, and they stood on the spot from which the sketch was taken 63 years ago by Mr Porter who was then one of the College boys. This spot is marked by an arrow in the margin of the picture. The college was removed two years afterwards (ibid) the sketch was taken to the present site and a stone building created.

(Signed) W Field Porter March 24th 1910.”

The WF Porter who was the student at St Johns died on 16 Oct 1910, but the reporting style suggests it was written by his son – also W Field Porter.

The original 1846 sketch does not appear to have survived. The whereabouts of the painting shown in the photograph is unknown.

The view can be compared with another known – see

<http://jktlibrary.files.wordpress.com/2010/03/sketch-of-stjohns.jpg> . There are considerable differences but perhaps some buildings can be recognised in both.