



Hokianga Historical Society Inc.

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Incorporating
Hokianga Museum

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NEWSLETTER MARCH 2019

Kia ora dear members

It has been a while since you heard from your executive but it's not been for lack of activity – far from it! As usual it's been busy over the long hot dry summer. But there have also been some quite basic changes going on, the first being that Donna Washbrook, our museum curator since we moved into the new building in 2012, has decided to embark on a quite different but very necessary area of service. Late last year she and Tony sadly lost the son they had been caring for over many years of his life. Now she hopes to act as a liaison for families living, as they did, with disability, helping them to access the help and products they need - she is very aware of the need for a fighting spirit in this.. We will miss you a lot, Donna, but we wish you every success in this new role. And thank you for your many years of service.

So for a while there we were without an active curator. But that couldn't continue, it's a long time before the next AGM, so at Donna's suggestion and by common consent the executive appointed **Rae Dellaca as Acting Curator** until the AGM comes around. Rae is the ideal person and has almost completed the Certificate in Museum Studies course which will stand her in good stead. But she is already our Correspondence Secretary and our Publicity Officer, and enormously capable though she is, no-one wants her burnt out before her time. (Which is why you have me back on the newsletter trail, at least temporarily – so I apologise to those who may be rather tired of my terrible verbosity as I can't change at my age).

But that's not all! The new year has brought changes to the volunteer situation as well. First, by word-of-mouth publicity we have been able to welcome four new members: **Rebecca Chou, John Browne, Kathryn Darby and Vivienne Davies**, all of whom are happy to become regular volunteers. Greetings to all of you! At the same time, though, we have lost the same number: **Shirley Solomon** left the district last month, and **Carol Lee, Pauline Cannon and Anne Rawiri** have found that ties of work, health and grandmotherhood are making a regular commitment difficult. They will still contribute as back-up contacts so we're very grateful for that, and for your past contributions. It does leave the regular roster looking a bit attenuated though, as it's too much to ask new people to fill spots without due orientation and you can't keep on flogging the willing horses among the old hands (mixed metaphor I know).

So we have taken the step resisted up until now, that of **closing the museum on a weekday – Thursday**. At least until we are able to fill all spaces with confidence. It will become the day for meeting and training, so any winter visitors may not be altogether out of luck. But we really hope it will be only temporary and for the winter months only.

While all these extra concerns have been going on, we have mounted two exhibitions that have attracted attention all summer. The **1918 Flu epidemic** hit Hokianga hard, in spite of Dr Smith's stringent regulations, so 100 years later we have gathered up as many details as we could find from existing accounts, family reminiscences and of course Papers Past, together with something of the background to the heroes and heroines involved. It makes for a harrowing story, especially in relation to the settlements of North Hokianga where conditions were dire (read Whina Cooper's description).

Alongside that, we go back 125 years to the **Women's Franchise** achievement. We had done our best to feature it well, back in 1993, but we were smaller then and in our old building – not so much display space. From that time though we did have a listing of all the Hokianga women

whose names appeared in the electoral rolls (they only had six weeks to get themselves enrolled) There were 145, and possibly more, in total. What did we know about them? The hope was to compile a profile (with photograph if possible) of every one of these 145 trail-blazers. Some are, or were, well-known forebears of still-local families. Easy! Many more though, in spite of their having the initiative to go and enrol (and presumably to vote, as well) are virtually invisible. To say it's a slow job is an understatement, there is much gnashing of teeth and bad language over recorded misspelling of names and the restrictions of the RBDM. This exhibition is still growing as one by one, more are pinned down (and up) but there are many more yet to come.

NB *If anyone has a grandmother / great grandmother / great great aunt etc known to have voted in 1893 in Hokianga we would love to include them in this. Please? Photo too?*

One thing that stood out is the number of really isolated women who had accompanied their husbands to the Government Assisted Settlements set up during the 1880s. Obviously they'd had time to be disillusioned with all the promises made at the beginning and not fulfilled, and were grasping at any chance to get changes made.

At the same time, the Digitising Group (those among the volunteers who are more computer-literate than most) has been beavering away creating a database for - first of all - our family files, so that at last there will be a backup for all that paper. Not before time. Paper gets worn with use and occasionally can disappear altogether, in spite of what should be eagle-eyed attention from those on duty. The files themselves will still be available for use, nothing changes there, but it is comforting to know that they also exist in another form.

We have just received a significant donation: a life's work of collecting family / community (Motukaraka) information, from **Sister Isabelle (Barbara Jean) Harding**, who has finally reached the stage of leaving the Marist Sisters Convent in Kaikohe where she's been since she retired from teaching. Her shift has been to a tiny room in the Selwyn Village: no space for anything but basics. Photograph albums – scrapbooks – writings – all had to be handed over. We are the beneficiaries and we are just so grateful, but that doesn't help the way she's feeling.

Since the recent publicity about the Provincial Development funding of the proposed "Manea – Footprints of Kupe" to be based in Opononi, there have been a few queries about whether the HHS is involved. The answer is that we're not, although over the years the various Trusts and planning bodies that have been behind it have sometimes dallied with the idea of joining forces, and we would have welcomed them. But there's history and history. Some belongs very specifically to local hapu and it's theirs to tell, if they choose to. "If it's about me, it's my story." In recognition of this, there is a verbal agreement in existence that our rohe should begin at 1820, with the first pakeha arrivals.

As well, our intentions are different. At this stage Manea seems to be aiming mainly at the overseas tourism market, whereas we are more concerned with recording Hokianga's history for the people of Hokianga, present and past. It seems that they intend to employ their staff, but we are all volunteers who 'own' the enterprise together.

Maybe in a hundred years or two, when we are all even more entwined than we are now, none of this will matter. Who knows?

It's a wake-up call to realise how very much occupied with the museum and its development we have been over the last few months, rather to the exclusion of any activity of the Historical Society as a whole. Without you, the membership, we would not exist, and you have been rather short-changed of late – no events, no excursions, no investigations being offered. We can and must do better!

P.S. And I almost forgot: we are changing to a new email address: **hokiangaahs@gmail.com** The old one still reaches us though.

E noho ra.
Alexa Whaley.