Māori Architecture 1900–18

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ABSTRACT: This decade can be noted for several distinct approaches to Māori architecture, reflecting a variety of nationalistic impulses. This paper offers a brief overview of the diversity of Māori architecture and ideas in this period. Pākehā, in the search for national identity, and also reflecting the interests of the global Arts and Crafts movement, were enthused by the local example of the carved and decorated whare whakairo, native timbers, Māori adzing techniques and local flora and fauna. This can be seen in the work of architects such as JW Chapman Taylor, as well as the symbolism and trademarks of popular culture, and the pattern of museum acquisitions. By the twentieth century Māori were seen as a culture that could soon become extinct and this is reflected in the images of artists such as Goldie ("The Calm Close of Valour's Various Days"), Lindauer's interest in preserving ersatz records of tradition and custom, and Dittmer's interest in myth and legend. Parliamentarian Āpirana Ngata, a member of the Young Maori Party, was very influential in the revival of certain customary arts (seen in the later establishment of schools of Māori arts and crafts in Rotorua) but he and his colleagues promoted a form of these arts that while "encouraging national Maori unity" also suppressed the diversity of activity in modern figurative painting and tribal identity for instance. These approaches can be contrasted with the patterns of building by other Māori movements more opposed to the government and actively seeking the restoration of Māori lands, rights and mana. Rua Kēnana's settlement at Maungapōhatu in the 1910s and TW Rātana's hall and church building later in the century (his ministry began in 1918) eschew the use of any meeting house forms or customary motifs – they were turning to new forms and symbols to sustain Māori identity in the new century.

This paper offers a brief overview of the diversity of Māori architecture and ideas in this period. In New Zealand the nineteenth century was a time of colonialism and conflict. By the period 1900 to 1918 Pākehā could look back at the end of an era with an attitude of almost nostalgic reflection and pride on what had been accomplished in the way of progress and transformation of the country. As seen in Goldie's 1906 *The Calm Close of Valour's Various Days,* Māori as a distinct race were seen as "passing away" or well on the way to being amalgamated into the developing New Zealand national identity and culture.

The development of a tourist industry and a new national pride in the landscape saw an exploration of symbols of national identity such as ferns, kiwis and Māori motifs, but also led to a deceptive and idealized impression of Māori culture and arts. Artists such as Goldie and Lindauer mythologised Māori with large history paintings that portrayed Māori in "old time" scenes that created a false impression of village life, tradition and custom. The chroniclers of "old time Māori" such as Elsdon Best and Augustus Hamilton (*Maori Art* 1896) also passed what they learned from their informants through a European view that, for instance, valued certain crafts, such as carving, over others, such as figurative painting; they valued what they perceived to be classical, rather than what was new or innovative. As Neich notes:

> ethnographers and commentators on Maori art at the end of the nineteenth century, such as Hamilton and James Cowan, were influenced by the Arts and Crafts movement in England, which was reaching colonial New Zealand about this time. Hamilton and Cowan began to express their ideas about Maori art in terms that would appeal to European connoisseurs of "good design." From this viewpoint, Maori art came to be regarded as ornament, where the status of ornament had become equal to that of art.[1]

This has led to a standardized, stereotyped

[1] Neich *Carved Histories* p 141.

view of Māori history, design, architecture and custom, a "Reed Books" portrayal of Māori that we are now emerging from. It is ironic for example that publication of Dittmer's *Te Tohunga* 1907, illustrating idealized Māori myths and legends, was coincident with the passing in Parliament of the Tohunga Suppression Act 1907 aimed at stopping the practice of traditional healing, a significant aspect of Māori spirituality and religious rites. And meanwhile, in the same year, Rua Kēnana was building a community in the Ureweras that would challenge notions of Māori assimilation and the conservative, orthodox view of what constituted Māori architecture.

The end of the nineteenth century had seen a significant number of so-called "Māori churches" built in rural areas largely by Roman Catholic or Anglican missionaries. They used European building techniques in a variety of English styles such as "Gothic" or "Tudor" translated into timber and decorated internally with Māori motifs "in an attempt to relate the native's traditional skills to their more recently acquired Christianity."[2] This could be interpreted as assimilatory or as an attempt to evolve an identity reflecting both cultures.

The growth of a New Zealand tourist industry was government-sponsored and centred on Rotorua for a number of reasons: the thermal attractions and spas, the Crown alliance with Te Arawa during the Land Wars, the richness of the Te Arawa carving style and the development of a direct train link in the 1890s. The Rotorua bath house was opened in 1908 and Whakarewarewa was reconstructed (despite opposition from many inhabitants) as a model village to experience "Māori life" in 1911.

Te Arawa have produced an enormous volume of richly carved houses, waka, pātaka and other items throughout the nineteenth century and up to the present day. They enjoyed the patronage of the tourist industry as well as influential Pākehā architectural writers. As Mead notes:

> the Arawa carving tradition continued unbroken but it did so partly as a result of some influential Pakeha patrons … and in part through the tourist industry; but mostly it flourished because Te Arawa's territory was not a battleground during the land wars.[3]

And Neich writes that as a result of this patronage:

> they (Te Arawa) became self-conscious preservers of those cultural elements regarded as traditional and conservatism was constantly reinforced by the approval of European residents and visitors.[4]

Pākehā architects (such as JW Chapman Taylor, for example) in the search for national identity, and also reflecting the interests of the global Arts and Crafts movement, were enthused by the local example of the carved and decorated whare whakairo and pātaka, native timbers and Māori adzing techniques, and the arts of Te Arawa enjoyed great exposure. Te Arawa carvers were employed by the government to produce carvings for an "old time village" in the Christchurch Exhibition of 1906-7. Te Arawa carver Anaha Te Rahui produced carvings for museum use around the country and in 1909 samples of these were sent to the Dominion Museum where they were displayed as typical examples of Māori carving for much of the twentieth century. Tene Waitere traveled to Sydney to build a model village for the 1910 exhibition. Consequently, for many the image of Māori architecture, art and craft is in fact Te Arawa's work created for European consumption and this has contributed to a distorted view of Māori design.

[2] Shaw *A History of New Zealand Architecture* p 78.

[3] Mead *Te Toi Whakairo* p 13.

[4] Neich *Carved Histories* p 232.

In other parts of the country during this period, different tribes had quite different relationships with the government. In 1901 during the Royal Visit, the future George V travelled to Rotorua on a special train, to be met by a gathering of over 5,000 Māori representing the tribes of New Zealand. Waikato and the King Movement were not among them: they felt that they were the people to host the Duke and that Ngāruawāhia was the place. And again in 1920, the Prince of Wales (the future Edward VIII) visited Rotorua, and although King Te Rata and a party gathered at the Ngāruawāhia station, the train steamed through without stopping, windows closed and blinds drawn so the Prince would not see the crowd. This story of political preference parallels an architectural historical preference as well, that sees the meeting house, particularly the Arawa example of the whare whaikairo centred around Rotorua, as the primary architectural form or archetype of an homogenous group, the Māori people, rather than exploring the diversity of Māori arts and design, springing as they do from a variety of tribes and displaying architectural, regional, authorial and generational differences.

JA Williams characterized this period as a time when Māori began to use the tools of European political power, such as Parliamentary representation, more effectively.[5] The Māori population was recovering from decline, but large amounts of Māori land continued to be alienated, and the poor economic and social condition of Māori was closely related to their land as they remained a rural society.

The Kotahitanga, or Māori Parliament of the 1890s, had held regular meetings at marae around the country, and a number of buildings were specifically built such as the unique two storey meeting house at Pāpāwai. The Kotahitanga was never recognized by the government and held its last meeting in 1907. And in that same year Te Whiti and Tohu, who had resisted land acquisition in Taranaki and built the community at Parihaka, died. Parallel to the Kotahitanga, the Kīngitanga movement set up their own autonomous assembly, the Kauhanganui at Maungakawa. This assembly set up village committees to deal with hygiene and building matters. Later in the Waikato, Te Puea Hērangi emerged as a Kīngitanga leader more centred on the Tainui tribal area. She focused on improving health and housing standards among Waikato people in response to epidemics of 1913 and 1918. During Seddon's ministry the government's Māori Councils Act 1900 had set up an experiment in Māori local self-government but the 19 Councils created were ineffective due to limited powers and poor funding.

Āpirana Ngata was elected to Parliament for Eastern Māori in 1905 and with Peter Buck and Māui Pōmare (first Director of Maori Hygiene in 1901, MP for Western Maori 1911), these young academics and politicians calling themselves the Young Maori Party had a significant effect on improving Māori living conditions in the period with government-sponsored land and health reforms that introduced modern standards of hygiene and building to Māori communities. Ngāti Porou in particular were extensively involved in the development of Māori-owned farms on the East Coast, but this was exceptional: most Māori survived on subsistence agriculture in small family units. However, Ngata's reforms were more accepted by Māori in the north and east of the North Island: the old raupatu areas such as Taranaki and the King Country remained suspicious of government intentions.

[5] Williams *Politics of the New Zealand Maori*

Ngata has a reputation as one who believed the Māori future was in assimilation with the Pākehā, yet he was also to have a significant effect on the regeneration of Māori culture in the 1920s with the promotion of the Māori language through education and the establishment of the Maori School of Arts and Crafts in 1928 in Rotorua. Neich notes "the building of meeting houses lapsed considerably in the years between 1914 and 1926 when Ngata realised that the Maori arts were in a serious decline."[6] His solution, the Arts and Crafts School, based as it was in Te Arawa heartland and administered by Pākehā, was to prove conventional and orthodox rather than innovative, and he and his colleagues promoted a form of these arts that while "encouraging national Māori unity"[7] also suppressed the diversity of activity in modern figurative painting and tribal identity for instance.

These approaches of conciliation and working within Pākehā political structures can be contrasted with the patterns of building by other Māori movements more opposed to the government. Rua Kēnana's settlement at Maungapōhatu in the Tūhoe country of Te Urewera was constructed in 1907, partly as a response to the opening up of Tūhoe land to Pākehā. Many Māori leaders of the nineteenth century were prophets, claiming visions and messages from a divine source. This allowed them to claim an authority and to establish credentials for leadership that they would not have under traditional tribal organisation. A photographic portrait of Rua Kēnana and his settlement was made by the photographer George Bourne in 1908 for *The Weekly News*. The Premier Joseph Ward had met with Rua only a month earlier at Whakatane.

The village ran along a ridge with Rua's house, Hiruhārama Hou, in the centre and a shop and a bank established to keep the people out of the hands of European creditors. These took the form of European buildings with no apparent customary motifs. Appropriating new forms and symbols allowed a more universal identification or pan-tribal appeal rather than the tribal signatures apparent in traditional forms. The plan of Hiruhārama Hou (a transliteration of New Jerusalem) was based on a description in a book of the Old Testament. The settlement was surrounded by a fence, a Waahi Tapu, with some dwellings inside and some outside. One gate was marked with the name Mihaia, a transliteration of the word Messiah, and symbolic emblems. The circular Hīona (Zion) was a council house and meeting hall based on the Islamic Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem: Rua had a lithograph of the building in his possession. The Dome was built in Jerusalem on the site of the Temple of Solomon, and its image appears frequently in nineteenth-century biblical literature, confused with its predecessor and serving as an illustration of the Temple. Many dispossessed Māori in the nineteenth century identified with the stories of the Old Testament: the Israelites exodus, the days and nights in the wilderness, the search for the promised land, and illustrations of these stories embellished the interior. Hīona was also unusual in that it was two storeyed, Rua and his family occupied the upper floor during meetings, raised above others.

The yellow diamond and blue club symbols on Hīona have been referred to as playing card symbols, and indeed playing cards were used by some as a mnemonic representing features of Christian teaching. Binney[8] relates a number of interpretations of them: the club could stand

[6] Neich *Painted Histories* p 117.

[7] Neich *Painted Histories* p 241.

[8] Binney, Chaplin, and Wallace *Mihaia*

for the Trinity, as well as the King of Clubs in the mnemonic signifying the last King, the prophet of the millenium. Rua adopted the club or trefoil as his own personal emblem as well. A prominent trefoil appears on a small nineteenth-century church in Ōpōtiki also known as Hīona and the site of the murder of Reverend Volkner by Kereopa during the New Zealand Wars. The diamond appeared on the Dome of the Rock and as a symbol in the Christian mnemonic could represent the Holy Ghost, as well as relating to a story of a hidden diamond on Maungapōhatu Mountain, a secret power source. It could also relate to the story of Te Kooti's diamond or the "Star in the East" of Te Kooti's prophecy regarding his succession as leader and be an allegory of the passing on of the mantle of leadership from one prophet to another.

The village went through a number of architectural changes in the period 1908 to 1916 including improvements in sanitation and the construction of a dance hall.

Judith Binney has asserted that the Young Maori Party was involved in the Tohunga Suppression Act 1907 and that it was specifically directed at Rua.[9] In 1916 Rua was arrested in a police raid and taken to Auckland where he was found guilty of resisting arrest: after serving two years hard labour he returned to Maungapōhatu in 1918 when Hīona was dismantled and the boards reused in the construction of a meeting house at Maai, Te Kawa A Māui. Hiruhārama Hou was also dismantled and a new dwelling for Rua was built with the same name. Rua died in 1937.

In 1918, outside Whanganui, Tahupōtiki Wiremu Rātana experienced visions of the Holy Spirit urging him to redeem the lot of the Māori people. From the 1920s on, Āpirana Ngata continued as a significant political figure, but was soon eclipsed by two major Māori movements: the Rātana Church, under TW Rātana, and the resurgent King Movement, based at Ngāruawāhia, under the leadership of Te Puea Hērangi. In alliance with the Labour Party both movements would be extremely influential both politically and architecturally as they embarked on major building programmes.

[9] Binney "Amalgamation and Separation" p 211.

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