

The Impact of Family Memory on the Descendants of a Missionary-Settler Family

JANE MOODIE

Abstract

Henry and William Williams came to New Zealand as missionaries to Maori in the 1820s. Today many of their descendants still believe the family has a special relationship with Maori. Life narrative interviews were analysed to explore the ways in which this belief plays out in the lives of 5th and 6th generation descendants. Many simply believe they have greater empathy with Maori than most Pakeha, but for some it has greater significance, providing them with a sense of identity and belonging. The family myth is shown to act synergistically with the modern ideology of biculturalism and other cultural myths.

Introduction

Family memory provides stories about a family's past which engage the imagination and carry with them a set of beliefs, ideals, or anxieties concerning identity, belonging, and relationships, including how we view our responsibility to past and future generations. These memories may carry forward over several generations, continuing to influence what descendants believe, and even how they live their lives. In an interview with Paul Thompson in 1990, John Byng-Hall, a psychiatrist, showed the power of his own 225-year-old family legend "in shaping the family's mythology, its image of itself." The family legend was that Admiral Byng was sent to defeat the French fleet in the Mediterranean, but finding his fleet outnumbered he instead retreated and was later shot for cowardice. Byng-Hall then describes how bravery and cowardice have become "central issues" for subsequent generations of the family.¹ The present study is based on life narrative interviews with descendants of a missionary-settler family, my own family, the Williamses, conducted more than 175 years after the first members of that family arrived in New Zealand. Many of the memories or stories about the early generations have now taken on a metaphoric or symbolic meaning, thus lending them a mythic quality, which shapes the personal memories of a number of descendants. Of course we should not simply reduce memory to myth, for as Natasha Burchardt has pointed out, "real personal experience breaks through, at times negating the myth, taking the story in unexpected directions and finally giving its own substance to every life story."² Rather, myth mediates between "reality and imagination," so that each descendant in remembering his or her own personal experience engages with family memory and myth in a different way, and simultaneously with various wider cultural images, old and new.³ These additional images may reinforce or conflict with family memory and myth, and together they help shape personal experience in unique ways. In this article I examine how one particular family myth is expressed by some of the Williams descendants and the variety of responses to it; above all, I hope to demonstrate the power of family myth to influence lives and memories in the present.

First, a brief overview of some relevant history is in order to contextualise the memories of this family. In 1823 Rev. Henry Williams and his wife, Marianne, arrived in the Bay of Islands to establish a mission to Māori at Paihia, under the auspices of the Church Mission Society. They were followed three years later by Henry's younger brother, William, and his wife, Jane. When the Treaty of Waitangi was signed, it was Henry and his son, Edward, who translated the

document into Māori and explained it to the assembled chiefs. Meanwhile, in 1839 William and Jane had established another mission station at Tūranga in Poverty Bay, and William continued to busy himself translating the New Testament into Māori and compiling *A Dictionary of the Māori Language*.

Both couples had large families, with 20 children all told, and in time the family spread to different parts of the North Island. To enable some of the sons to farm, land was bought from Māori near Paihia and later on the East Coast, in Hawkes Bay and in the Wairarapa. So in time there developed four family enclaves, or what one member of the family called “Williams hatcheries.”⁴ At Te Aute, in Hawkes Bay, Rev. Samuel Williams (son of Henry and Marianne) and his wife Mary (daughter of William and Jane) set up an Anglican boarding school for Māori boys in the 1850s. Much later, Samuel also established a trust in memory of Henry and William Williams to help fund both the college and the Māori church.

This is a family that values its memory and myth, and there are several overlapping strands to that myth: one relates to religion and the church; another relates to land and class; and finally there is the myth of the Williams family’s special relationship with Māori, which is the focus of this discussion. Some of this has been recorded in a number of books, and some has been passed down at family gatherings big and small, from the dinner table and the fireside to grand reunions.⁵ And much is linked to various artefacts in family homes including Māori artefacts, cloaks and tiki, but also desks, old books, and of course portraits of Henry and William, which hung in many homes I visited. As one member of the family said, “That old missionary’s watching me again. . . . There he is again, still watching me.”⁶ Implicit in this comment is the inescapable sense of a duty to live according to certain Williams family values.

Myths of the family depict these missionaries as Dissenters of deep religious conviction, high moral rectitude, dedicated, self-sacrificing, and brave. Henry is the better known of the two men; sometimes called Father of the Tribes, or Peacemaker of the Tribes, he is envisioned walking unarmed to fearlessly confront Māori warriors or threatening tohunga. Another image is that of Henry labouring all night over the translation of the Treaty into te reo in order to ensure the signing of the Treaty at Waitangi. And finally there is the story that on news of his death, Māori in the North abandoned their battle to come and mourn his passing. Henry is often referred to by members of the family using the names given him by Māori: Te Wiremu, a Māori form of Williams, and Karuwaha which means “four eyes” and refers to his strong glasses. These names seem to be used by the family to emphasise the relationship with Māori. William was seen as the more scholarly of the two men and the better linguist, and is chiefly remembered for his translation of the New Testament and, with his son Leonard and grandson Herbert, for the Williams Māori dictionary. Treasured old copies of these books are in a number of family homes. All of these stories have moral meaning and can be drawn upon by descendants to shape their views of their family and themselves, their own identity and how they should live their lives.

All 50 members of the family whom I interviewed were born in the first half of the twentieth century, and so now we turn to some of the political, social and cultural changes that were happening during their lives, for it is not only the collective memory of the family that concerns us here, but also how that overlaps and interacts with wider public cultural meanings.⁷ By 1950, Māori had suffered nearly a hundred years of deprivation, and the progressive loss of land and language. After World War Two, with rapid urbanisation, Māori became much more aware of

the disadvantage and discrimination they faced. In the 60s and 70s this led to protest and the Māori renaissance: the Treaty was recognised as a founding document after more than one hundred years of being largely ignored by Pākehā; a Māori political party was formed, te reo Māori at last became an official language of New Zealand, the Waitangi Tribunal was established to deal with Māori grievances under the Treaty, and settlements of these grievances were gradually progressed. The notion of a bicultural nation began to replace the belief that “we are all one people,” although not without resistance from Pākehā.

These changes have a bearing on the life narratives of the Williamses as they seek to reconcile the family myth of the special relationship with Māori with this changing national story. The myth now appears to be understood by some members of the Williams family as an opportunity to engage in wider social and political issues regarding biculturalism and adherence to the Treaty, in order both to make meaning of their own lives and to justify and fan the flame of family myth. Meanwhile, discomfiting questions fester below the surface, as they have done for over 150 years. For while the Treaty rises to greater political prominence, Henry Williams’s part in its signing comes under considerable criticism. To what extent was he attempting to protect Māori interests, and to what extent was he deliberately acting as an agent of colonisation? And while the family recalls his attempts in 1840 to prevent large scale loss of land by Māori to the New Zealand Company, the size and nature of his and his family’s own land purchases, already in the nineteenth century the subject of much official inquiry, comes once again under scrutiny.⁸ These anxieties are apparent in the Williams narratives also, sometimes negating the myth of the special relationship, but sometimes possibly providing motivation for engaging with Māori.

I taped quite long life-narrative interviews, giving people free rein to compose their memories so as to make sense of their identities and their past and present lives in a manner with which they felt comfortable. I should like to make it clear that this study is based on memories that have been passed down; these are regarded by the narrators as being true, and are important because they influence the way some of the Williams descendants think about themselves and their relationship with Māori in the present. However, it is also important to note that other people who are identified in their accounts may have different memories or interpretations of the events described.

The belief that the family had, or still has, a special relationship with Māori was expressed in a variety of ways, and whilst for many people it was a source of pride there were a few who were embarrassed or at least conflicted about it, seeing it as paternalistic or arrogant. I will first discuss some examples of this myth, looking at the various themes that emerge from the narratives, and then I will provide a selection of more detailed vignettes which will show how family memory and myth can interact with both individual memory and cultural or national myths to impact significantly on how some members of the family understand their lives. These narratives are often quite emotional and speak of finding meaning, purpose in life and a sense of belonging in this country.

Memory Motifs

For many of those I interviewed, language was seen as the key to the relationship. Almost none of the family today speak te reo, but a common refrain in these narratives was the proud assertion, “My father/grandfather spoke fluent Māori.”⁹ For some, this seems to be just a statement for the record, expressing perhaps their acceptance of and by Māori. Douglas Davies,

for instance, insisted that in telling me that his father and grandfather both spoke Māori, he was trying to convey to me that this made him more “tolerant” of Māori, indeed gave him a “strong rapport” with them.¹⁰ For others members of the family it bears somewhat greater meaning. Sheila Williams, a librarian, was clearly proud that her grandfather, Herbert Williams, had been the editor of the fifth edition of *A Dictionary of the Māori Language* and also compiled *A Bibliography of Printed Māori to 1900*. She has sometimes used this historical connection to relate better to Māori in her work situation.¹¹ Similarly, Bruce Hutton, a police forensics expert, was particularly proud of his grandfather, George Hutton, a grandson of Henry Williams. George had been an interpreter for land transactions in the Wairarapa, and according to Bruce had earned in equal measure the confidence of Māori and the mistrust of Pākehā landowners, including some of his own Williams relatives. His descendants placed George Hutton’s papers in the Turnbull Library with the hope that the record would help Māori to get redress for injustices. With this subversive approach it is unsurprising to find that Bruce regarded the Huttons as Williams outliers, but nevertheless true to the early family ethos of supporting Māori.¹² Bruce’s cousin, Bob Hutton, was only two when his father died. At age 10 he was given his father’s Williams dictionary, and in the hope of forging a link with his father he used this to try and teach himself te reo. Later in life when he married a woman from Tainui, he recalled that she told him not to speak te reo because he was using Ngā Puhī words, “the enemy language” for Tainui. However, Bob still held strongly to the view that “language is the most important thing” in communicating across cultures without causing offence.¹³ In contrast to these three, John Russell saw the ability of his uncle, A. B. Williams, to speak te reo as simply a useful means to control his Māori farm workers and to prevent them from getting the better of him.¹⁴ Thus although all were proud of their ancestors’ ability to speak te reo, the value they attributed to this skill varied from hopefully promoting Māori interests and furthering Māori–Pākehā relations, to controlling Māori.

Another common theme was the claim to a special friendship with Māori, often based on ties between specific families, but this sometimes raised troubling stereotypical images of Māori and of a relationship that was either racist or patronising, or both. Tom Reed was nearly 90 when I interviewed him. He spoke of spending his childhood and youth with local Paihia Māori, learning to fish, attending hāngī, and working on the farm with them. For him these were “pure bred,” hard-working, traditional Māori who knew their place, unlike the vociferous, unruly Waitangi protesters of the 1990s.¹⁵ Bill Ludbrook recalled that he and his brother, particularly after rugby games, used to play their guitars in the local Ohaeawai pub with a bar full of happy Māori, all singing their hearts out in harmony.¹⁶ In Tom Williams’s memory of his childhood friendship with a young Māori boy, he recalled that although the boy’s father worked on the Williams property in the Wairarapa and Tom was the son of the boss, “at the end of the day, in our eyes, we were absolutely equal.”¹⁷ This was a nostalgic view of a childhood friendship in which he was able to ignore differences of class and race, a situation which he regretted does not exist today. By contrast, Nicola Grimmond who grew up near Te Aute and recalled a similar situation, insisted that the apparent equality between Māori and Pākehā children was even then misleading; they played with one another, they ate at each other’s homes, but, she said, she was always aware that there was a difference, that “we had the big house.”¹⁸

Frequently, the stories of friendship between the Williamses and Māori involved the mutual recognition of two elites. Sheila Williams and Sarah Williams both described this when they spoke of their relationships with members of the Kaa family of Ngāti Porou.¹⁹ When I asked Tom Williams why he had invited Māui Pōmare to write the foreword for his recently published

Wairarapa family history, he told me that the friendship of these two Wairarapa families, the Williamses and the Pōmares, had been fostered over three generations by attending the same private school together, and he saw them as leaders in their respective communities with a shared responsibility to promote better relations between Māori and Pākehā.²⁰ I had been told that the family's relationship with Māori was particularly good on the East Coast, so I was very surprised to hear Bill (H. B.) Williams, from Turihaua Station north of Gisborne, express considerable anger towards them, largely due to his belief that a Waitangi claim was being made on his farm. When I therefore challenged him about the family relationship with Māori, he responded with a story of a recent celebration at the Manutuke church when one of the elders pulled Bill aside and said "You're not one of them, you're one of us. . . . You'll sit with the [Māori] elders.' . . . And I haven't forgotten that because it showed an affinity there [with] the family."²¹ Bill, like many of the Williams family today, saw Māori falling into two camps, radical and traditional, the latter still respecting the mutual relationship. Peter Sykes, a deacon of the Anglican Church, also made this distinction as he claimed the right to stand on the marae of Ngā Puhi and Ngāti Porou, through the "Williams whānau" and their partnership with Māori since the 1820s. He said, "The kaumatua, not the radicals necessarily, will acknowledge that journey" and that this is "the power of whakapapa . . . that lineage is power." However, he spoke ironically, recognizing and perhaps feeling uncomfortable with the class-based origins of these differences.²² In his book, *He Tipua*, Ranginui Walker explains how Sir Apirana Ngata saw the Williams family as models to be "emulated in dress, manners, lifestyle" by Māori of rangatira status. When in 1912 Ngata built a large house intended to match the houses of "rangatira Pākehā" like the Williamses, it was a symbolic statement that, notwithstanding colonisation, Māori were still rangatira in their own land. In farming operations, he sought their practical advice and financial support; in the political arena, he used their patronage. He thus acquired knowledge from the Pākehā elite, which he disseminated for the benefit of Māori. Thus the Williams and Māori elites seem to have formed a complementary relationship within which, to some extent, they were able to "remember the journey" together.²³

The presence of Māori at Williams family funerals is another memory motif that speaks of the relationship. The first such occasion was in 1867 after Henry's death, which occurred while a tribal battle was underway in the North. The story is recorded in a number of books about the family, and Phyllis Garlick, for instance, writes with a biblical flourish that as darkness fell, word went around both opposing camps that Te Wiremu was dead. Thereupon Māori abandoned their fight and rival chiefs "marched side by side to their dead friend's house to pay together their last tribute of respect, and to carry him to his grave."²⁴ Similar though less dramatic stories relate to the funeral in 1907 of Samuel Williams at Te Aute; the ceremony was said to be attended by many Māori, and the coffin, draped in Māori cloaks as roimata, was carried to the grave by Māori.²⁵ The presence of Māori at these funerals is seen by the family as a great honour and as an indication of how Māori value their relationship with the Williamses; it is a huge source of pride within the family. These stories find an echo in the current generations. Bill Ludbrook was only six when his beloved father died at Waimate North. His father had played rugby and cricket with local Māori and Bill was quite emotional about the fact that so many attended his funeral; "they just came out of the bush on their ponies . . . [there were] Māoris everywhere," he said.²⁶ Brian Williams, a Te Aute farmer, had spent much of his life in researching and documenting local Māori history, and his daughter, Anne Seymour, was gratified by the number of Māori attending his funeral; in Anne's memory Māori outnumbered family. Local Māori took him from his home to "lie in state" at Te Aute College, and the subsequent funeral service at the Pukehou church was taken by Bishop Manu Bennett

and Piripi Cherrington. In Anne's eyes this strong Māori presence both affirmed his work and reproached his relatives for failing to appreciate its importance.²⁷

The relationship with Māori appeared to be used by a few of the Williams family as a claim to "deep belonging" in Aotearoa. This is the term I have used for the desire to truly belong, to claim legitimacy and to overcome alienation in white settler societies, and is related to time, an expression of the desire to embed oneself in the *longue durée* of history. The idea has been explored by Peter Read in the Australian context.²⁸ Such an assertion was evident at the start of Tom Reed's life story. He spoke of an episode, "my greatest claim to fame," which occurred when he was only two years old, and was therefore surely reinforced in his memory by much family recounting. He visited an old Māori woman, Miriam Joyce, who lived beside the Paihia church. She was over 90 at the time, as old as Tom himself when I met him. Miriam had been taught by Marianne and Jane Williams and was 17 when Henry Williams was present at the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi. "She insisted on me sitting on her knee," Tom recalled, evoking an earth-mother image of an ancient indigenous woman welcoming and nurturing not just a new generation, but a new people.²⁹ Tom was claiming here not just long historical links, but a deeper belonging through acceptance by *tangata whenua*. And this kind of claim can also be made through land and the awareness of Māori knowledge, sometimes associated with particular sites. A rich example of this kind of pleading can be found in the lengthy speech which Bill Ludbrook made to Ngā Puhī in 1997, when he tried unsuccessfully to persuade them to allow him to repurchase what had once been family land on the Taiamai plain.³⁰ Bill proclaimed himself by birth, by sentiment, by long-standing family association, by the fact that his ancestors are buried side by side with Māori, and by his knowledge of local Māori legend and history, to be part of the land and of its *tangata whenua*, Ngā Puhī. "I know where Hōne Heke is buried. . . . I am an exile from Ngā Puhī," he declared. "Return the land to me and the . . . Pūriri trees will laugh again."³¹ Here Bill was referencing a proverb from Ngā Puhī in the Bay of Islands area, "Ka kata ngā Pūriri ō Taiamai," which symbolises delight at good news, that all is well with the world, and is sometimes used to welcome an honoured guest. He was thus suggesting that Ngā Puhī would welcome him to his rightful place among them, on the land of his and their ancestors.³²

During these interviews the subject of the Treaty often arose spontaneously in connection with Henry Williams; most of the family were proud of his involvement in the Treaty, some defiantly so, arguing that whatever he got wrong he had tried to do his best for Māori. Most felt that in some way the Williams family had or has a particular stake in the signing of the Treaty, giving them a place in New Zealand history. But some went further, sensing that it imposed an extra obligation on them; Peter Sykes stated this most plainly when he said that because Henry Williams's signature is on the Treaty, this made it not just a national partnership but a personal one for the family.³³ The question of Treaty settlements was more contentious however, and often gave rise to emotionally charged discourses. Several felt that the claims will just go on ad infinitum and asked, for instance, why Māori had any right to airwaves, which were not even known about in 1840 when the Treaty was signed. At the opposite end of the spectrum is Jean Maclean who believed Waitangi Tribunal reports should be compulsory reading for every New Zealander, as "history being retold by Māori." She confronted the airwaves issue by asking indignantly, "Who says that [when the Treaty was signed] the Crown knew anything about them? . . . If you're thinking of the Treaty as a partnership, who said the Crown could appropriate the rights to buy and sell something they didn't know anything about either?"³⁴ Breaches of the Treaty also offended Eric Williams who argued that his "missionary

background” gave him greater empathy with Māori than was the case for most New Zealanders, and became quite agitated as he traversed the wrongs done, from Waikato land confiscations to Parihaka to the Raglan Golf course. Settlements, he argued, should not be made begrudgingly, but in a spirit of generosity.³⁵ Likewise Elisabeth Ludbrook was damning of the treatment of Māori at Bastion Point in the 1970s, an action which she believed was exactly the kind of thing that Henry Williams stood against when, for instance, in 1840 he criticised the extensive land purchases in the Wellington region by the New Zealand Company, and warned Wanganui and Taranaki Māori not to fall into the same trap.³⁶

A number of the family saw their work with and for Māori as evidence of the family’s continuing special relationship. Much of this work is done through the Henry and William Williams Memorial Trust, the Te Aute College Trust and Te Rūnanga o te Pihopitanga o Aotearoa. The Memorial Trust is in a sense the inheritor of the Williamses’ mission to Māori, giving money to Māori education and to Te Pihopitanga. At the time of the interviews, Bill (W. A.) Williams was the chairman and passionate about the work of the Trust; his vision was that it be a true partner to Māori, walking alongside, not just dispensing money. At a Māori Synod shortly before the interview, he had argued that the relationship between Māori and members of the Trust goes back to 1823 and the relationship first established between their “old people,” and that the treaty and the gospel “are in their bones” and bind them together in a solemn covenant. He concluded his speech by saying “It is a taonga for us both, to be held in trust from God, and it relies on our trust in each other for its well-being. We, like you, honour our old people of both tikanga who have walked the journey down through the generations to the present day.”³⁷ Another member of the Trust, Hugh MacBain, had questioned in the past whether the Trust should continue to be comprised entirely of family, but had now come to the view that because it is unique and of “special significance for the family,” it should remain unchanged.³⁸ In recent years, they have tried to mend the rift between Te Aute and the girls’ school, Hukarere, a process which Hugh felt was “a bit of going back to the early missionaries . . . being the peacemaker of the tribes.”³⁹ For Peter Sykes also, the Trust had a special role as “te ahi kā, the holders of the flame,” keeping alive the idea of the Williams family’s partnership with Māori, as well as the converse. He believed both sides of this partnership needed to be reminded at times of “the journey” which their forebears walked together.⁴⁰ Of course not all members of the family who work with Māori did so through the Trust. In fact, Peter Sykes himself was an Anglican deacon working in Māngere, and saw his work among Māori and Pacific people as a fulfilment of the Treaty partnership. Likewise, Nicola Grimmond saw some of her work emanating from what she called the “Te Aute ethos.” A retired university lecturer, she was for 20 years on the Otago University Council, where she pushed for student services and became liaison person for Māori students and an advocate for a Māori students centre. It seemed a “natural” thing for her to do, having grown up “totally aware of Māori values and ways of life.”⁴¹

These memory motifs—the use of te reo, specific friendships with Māori, Māori attendance at family funerals, Treaty concerns, and working with and on behalf of Māori—are the main ways that the belief in the Williams family’s special relationship was expressed in many of the narratives I recorded. In most cases the family myth did not appear to have played a vital role in determining the life course of the narrator or framing their memories. However, there were a few cases in which it seemed that belief in the family’s special relationship with Māori had been pivotal in shaping their lives, giving them meaning and purpose, inspiring them to dedicate their lives to working with Māori, and providing them with a deep sense of belonging

in this country. As we turn to examine the narratives of these individuals, it will be apparent that various other ideals, beliefs and myths were also coming into play, often acting synergistically with the family myth to give it greater power.

The Power of Family Myths in Individual Lives

Jean Maclean, having just returned from a week-long te reo immersion course, began her interview with a mihi. Jean had lived her whole life at Te Aute and had the reputation among the Williamses of being the teller of family stories. She described how she herself grew up with family stories; how her uncle, Canon Arthur Williams, lived close by and of a winter's evening would tell them stories about the family as they sat around the fire; about the signing of the Treaty, the founding of Te Aute College by Samuel Williams, the relationship with Māori, about a "faith that was trying to be practiced." "I grew up in the shadow of all that," Jean said several times, and recalled that she always had a "yen to somehow be a bridge between our two peoples." "It was something in my bones," she added, suggesting a sense of destiny.⁴²

Jean talked much about Samuel, her great grandfather, who, she said, identified himself strongly with Māori interests and was acknowledged by Māori to be a very fine Māori linguist. He was, said Jean, using modern terminology, "truly bicultural," and that was what Jean herself sought to become. When her children went to boarding school she approached John Tamahori at the College to begin learning te reo, and it was through this experience that Jean suggested her "eyes were finally opened to the Māori world." She spoke of this like a religious conversion. At the same time she and her husband, Jim (a descendant of William Williams), were working through the Henry and William Williams Trust to try and rebuild and save Te Aute College, and also support the Māori Bishopric of Aotearoa. Drawn out from the domestic sphere into public life, Jean was thrilled to find herself at hui meeting politicians like Matiu Rata and Norman Kirk, churchmen and academics like Bishop Bennett, Archbishop Paul Reeves, Hugh Kāwharu, Pat Hōhepa, as well as the local kaumatua. The Treaty was vitally important to Jean; she saw it as being like a marriage covenant. "I, Māori take thee Pākehā . . . I, Pākehā take thee Māori, to have and to hold, for richer, for poorer, for better, for worse, etc."⁴³ A committed Christian, for her to live the Treaty was to live the Gospel. And yet she was also conflicted about the family's role with regard to Māori. Over the years, Jean had wrestled with the problematic history of the Williams family with respect to both land transactions with Māori and the Treaty, but she told me that she now believed firmly that whatever mistakes Henry and Samuel may have made, their hearts were always in the right place for Māori.

So when her husband died, she was immensely proud of the large Māori presence at the funeral, which was held in St Luke's Church, Havelock North. This was a vital part of her narrative. Unconventionally, Jean had chosen to have Jim's coffin on the floor near the altar, with herself and her grandchildren sitting around it, rather in the style of a tangi. She was careful to explain to me that this seemed right to her at the time. Jean recalled that Bishop Whakahuihui Vercoe came over to where they were sitting on the floor. She said, "Hui was the last one to speak and he came over—John Tamahori had come down from Auckland with Ben te Haara, and various ones from here too. And Hui came over and said, 'I'm going to talk to the grandchildren.' . . . And he said, 'Your grandpa was much older than you think. We've known him for—we've known him since—was much older than you think. We've known him since 1823.'"⁴⁴ She stumbled in the telling of this because it was really important for her to get it right; such a statement from the bishop was proof to her of the enduring relationship between the family and

Māori, an embodiment of the Treaty, and a validation of the work she and her husband had done with the Trust over decades. Importantly, it was also a new family memory for her grandchildren to carry forward in their own lives. In Jean's life and narrative we can see the extraordinary power of family memory, acting in synergy with other myths, to influence both beliefs and actions as she tried to live out the hope of her ancestors for the benefit of future generations.

A quite different take on the myth of the special relationship was found in the narrative of Rob Reed. Rob was born and brought up on the East Coast, but, although many of the Williamses lived in this region, he said that he had little contact with the family. He worked as a pilot overseas for several decades, returning to live in Paihia where he immersed himself in Māori culture, learning and then teaching carving, taiaha skills and navigation; he helped to build the waka that sailed to Rarotonga in 1992, and was a crew member of the Waitangi waka, Ngātokimatawhaorua. He had made his own taiaha, had his own tauparapara, and spoke of his involvement with Māori as “predestined,” due to his “connection with Karuwha.”⁴⁵ But Rob was most anxious to tell me the story and significance of the hei-tiki, Ngā Kahurangi o Ngā Rangi Wairua, which was given to Henry Williams. However, he began this story not with Henry Williams, but right back with the origin of the greenstone in the Arahura River, from whence the hei-tiki came. The hei-tiki was made for a Ngāi Tahu chief, and passing through eight or nine generations and several different iwi, it ended up with Noa Huke of Ngāti Kahungunu, who then gave it to Henry Williams. Here is what Rob had to say:

It was Noa Huke who actually gave it to Henry, and he gave the gift of the mana associated with the hei-tiki to Henry, to give the right to stand on all the marae of the tribes and speak, and to safeguard his family. *The gift was of the mana.* He had to give the object because that is what carried the mana. And that, with the origin of greenstone, and being given a hei-tiki that old, it's something like 250 years old, and been held by eight generations of the descendants of Piriamā and it was given to our ancestor; that ties our family, as far as I'm concerned, to the very *origins* of Aotearoa.⁴⁶

There was an emotional quiver in Rob's voice as he spoke, because he was making a quite extraordinary statement here, essentially staking a claim as tangata whenua, people of the land, as Ngāti Wiremu. Not only was his ancestor involved in the signing of the Treaty, not only was he here before the Treaty, but with this gift had become part of Māori pre-European history and furthermore linked to the origins of the land. It was a claim, despite his purely colonial antecedents, to “deep belonging” in this country, similar to that of Māori themselves. Rob's desire to immerse himself in tikanga Māori seemed to be an expression of a profound sense of homecoming and belonging after his years overseas, the story of the Williams hei-tiki his justification. Sarah Williams also spoke of this hei-tiki but was careful to explain that the giving of such a gift may not continue for all subsequent generations; it depends on how the gift was given and it seems that this is not known within the family. It may be that the hei-tiki should in fact be returned, if requested, to the descendants of Noa Huke.⁴⁷

One of the few Māori members of the family in this older generation whom I interviewed was Karl Hutton, who liked to think of himself rather modestly and simply as a “positive product of biculturalism.” His mother was Hiamoe Te Whare of Maniapoto and his father, Noel, a descendant of Henry Williams. Karl recalled how proud his father was that Henry was “so revered by Māori,” and how he used to read to the children about Henry, and take them on

holidays to visit Williams relatives, and family sites, cemeteries, and to attend reunions. Karl eventually joined the New Zealand Navy as Works Officer at the Devonport naval base, where he finally rose to the level of Commander and was “proud to be the highest-ranking Māori the navy had ever had.”⁴⁸ Being a military officer gave Karl a new-found sense of importance, but it was in the 1990s, when bicultural courses were introduced in the navy, that Karl’s sense of self-worth really flourished as he gained greater understanding of both sides of his family. In 1995, 96, and 97 he was detailed to coordinate the Treaty commemorations at Waitangi and, at the request of the Race Relations Conciliator, to develop a bicultural element as the navy’s contribution. “What I really enjoyed about doing that . . . was that of course Henry Williams was involved with the Treaty too. And these years later it felt really neat for me to be part of commemorating what he did all those years before,” he recalled.⁴⁹ While at Paihia making these arrangements he was surprised to find a carving of Henry Williams on the back pou of the Te Tii Marae. Enquiring as to the reason, he was told that when some of Ngati Rāhiri’s land was confiscated, Henry Williams used CMS money to buy it back for them. “That’s why he’s the foundation of this marae, and as his descendant you are more tangata whenua than I,” a local kaumatua told him.⁵⁰

Karl was also asked to establish a marae at the naval base, and to decide on the protocol that would be observed there. They convened a hui, which included Tainui and Ngā Puhī. Knowing the traditional animosity between these two iwi, Karl as chairperson was nervous that the navy would be caught in the crossfire. He consulted his mother.

So what we decided I would do, would be to recite my whakapapa in Māori from the Tainui side, then change to English and say, “On my Pākehā side there’s Henry Williams,” because Henry Williams was sort of formally adopted almost by Ngā Puhī. And Mum said to me, she said, “So stand there and say ‘I stand on two feet, and I have no bias in the kawa for this marae’” . . . and she said, “When [you] talk through the Tainui part, the Tainui will all sit there and they’ll say, ‘Ah yes, he’s one of ours.’” And then I said, “But I should say this other bit too, because that’s part of me as well.” And she said, “Oh yes, if you say that, Ngā Puhī’s going to say, ‘He’s part of ours.’” . . . And that’s exactly what happened.⁵¹

For Karl this was an important journey of self-discovery, drawing together the threads of identity from both his Tainui roots, from which he was estranged as a child, as well as his Williams roots and links to Ngā Puhī. A diffident man by nature, it had given him pride and a much greater self-confidence. As he said, he does indeed stand on two feet. Karl’s journey coincided with, and in fact derived much of its impetus from the development of the government’s bicultural policies, which he himself had been involved in implementing in the navy.

While Karl and his sister were the only Māori members of the family I interviewed, I did speak with two people who had married Māori. One of these was Anne Seymour whose outlook had been strongly shaped by her father, Brian Williams. Although not a religious man, he was very serious about the family’s role in New Zealand and their relationship to Māori, and Anne shared his views. Growing up near Te Aute she remembered not only constant contact with extended family, but also helping her father with the detailed work he did in recording local Māori history and whakapapa, now lodged in the Napier Museum. Several times in her narrative Anne suggested that she had privileged knowledge of Māori, understanding local legend and tikanga better than most other members of the family.

Anne married Roy Seymour from Tūwharetoa, and although she did not say so explicitly, the way she contextualised the story of her marriage as a continuation of the work of her father and earlier ancestors with Māori suggested that she saw it as a culmination of the family mission. She acknowledged the difficulties she had encountered due both to Pākehā attitudes to her marriage and to the bitterness some Māori feel towards the Williamses, who she said often “cheated in land and love.” But she rejoiced in the warm and deep relationship between her husband and her father, who used to pore over whakapapa together. Encouraged by her father, Anne has taken her marriage role extremely seriously. “I can remember him saying to me . . . when I married Roy, that I had to be like Ruth in the Bible, that I must remember that I had married Māori and I must learn everything I could about his culture,” she told me.⁵²

Anne said that she and Roy have very deliberately blended their different cultural traditions into their family life, and at the end of the interview she showed me to a room dedicated to remembering the history of their two families. It was a room of artefacts where every piece had its story. She proudly showed me a picture of Roy’s great-great-grandmother, Ahumai te Paerata of Ngāti Raukawa, contemporaneous with Henry Williams. Anne told me it was Ahumai who was the one at the siege of Ōrākau in 1864 who defied the British offer to allow women and children to leave, saying “No, we will fight beside our men for ever and ever.”⁵³ Here Anne was somewhat elevating the role of Ahumai, for it was a man who declared their intention to fight on forever, whereupon William Mair suggested the women and children should be allowed to leave the pā. At this point Ahumai did indeed speak up saying “Ki te mate ngā tāne, me mate anō ngā wāhine me ngā tamariki,” “If the men die, the women and children must die also.” When the Māori abandoned the pā many were killed, and Ahumai was wounded as she fled.⁵⁴ This seemed an uncomfortable juxtaposition of ancestors, the one seen as part of colonisation, the other at the brutal end of the colonisers’ military strength. And in coming to understand more of the Māori perspective, Anne has been obliged to disavow some of the Williamses’ attitudes and actions towards them. Despite this, in her quiet way, it seemed that Anne has elevated her domestic life to what she saw as the culmination of the missionary endeavour, a fulfilment of the Treaty, in a bicultural marriage.

Finally, we come to Sarah Williams’s narrative in which dichotomies are the touchstone, the notion of always living in two worlds: experiencing an “English childhood” in rural Wairarapa, being Roman Catholic in a strongly Anglican family, living in Japan and realising the centrality of language in cross-cultural encounter, and finally returning to New Zealand in the 1970s amazed to find that French is the second language in our airports. “But where was Māori?” she asked indignantly, “Not anywhere!”⁵⁵ This was Sarah’s road to Damascus experience, after which she set out with great determination to learn te reo, despite opposition and scorn at times from both family and Māori. However, she was supported and encouraged by Keri Kaa who told her, ““You are the messenger to the Pākehā. That is your role.”” After 20 years of study, Sarah said she “entered the Māori world.”⁵⁶ She then saw herself as a go-between, connecting the Māori and Pākehā worlds, working as a translator and transcriber for the Waitangi Tribunal and helping to restore justice to Māori, while at the same time helping Pākehā, and especially the Williamses, become more familiar with te reo and tikanga. She was convinced of Henry’s “total integrity” with regard to the Treaty, that it was “the best he could get for Māori.”⁵⁷ She admitted that at times Māori “may see us as the enemy, now, in the current phase, like we are some of the most powerful Crown agents,” but despite this she was unwavering in her belief that the family is inextricably linked with Māori.⁵⁸

In the year 2000, Sarah was asked to read the Treaty in Māori at the official Waitangi function at Government House. The Governor-General at the time was Sir Michael Hardie-Boyes, and his wife, Mary, was a member of the Williams family. Sarah explained how she understood this event through a Māori worldview:

When you're in a tapu situation, a situation that is sacred, a situation that is powerful in symbolism, you're really in the eternal present, all right? That's how they see it. And in the eternal present you see the forbears, the ancestors, and you see the current numbers, you and me and Mary Hardie-Boyes and everyone, and we're enacting something that is totally part and parcel of what has gone before, and it's a magic thing, it's timeless. You are sort of lifted up into eternity for a little bit, do you know?⁵⁹

This passage operated on two levels: not only was Sarah describing her role as go-between, the sense of living in two worlds, but in explaining it to me, a member of her family, she was also performing the go-between role. Consciously adopting a Māori perspective and envisaging the family drawn in across the generations, the present is transformed into a continuation with the past.⁶⁰ Sarah was thrilled by this experience, saying it was a “huge buzz,” but more than this she acknowledged that it was a sort of transcendental experience which affirmed both her role on this day and her chosen path in life as her destiny.⁶¹ She found enormous fulfilment in her mastery of te reo and in the work she did. She spoke laughingly but earnestly of her “missionary zeal”, and of wearing the “mantle of Henry Williams” as the go-between; “I am it for this generation” she claimed. She told me that fluency in te reo and familiarity with tikanga and mātauranga made her feel that at last she belonged in this country, the anxieties of dichotomy at least partially resolved. “It is a nice thing being able to move easily in both worlds.”⁶²

It may be tempting to extrapolate from Sarah Williams's discussion on the “eternal present,” to suggest that other members of the Williams family also appear to be constructing an “eternal present.” However, it is Sarah alone who speaks of this, and she alone who makes the claim to think “with a Māori mind-set.” Nepia Mahuika has told me that the “eternal present” is not an expression he thinks Māori would choose to describe their belief that the past is always in the present, and that both past and future are shaped by the present.⁶³ No doubt some other members of the family (for instance Jean Maclean) would have been aware of these beliefs, but I am wary of attributing to them the claim that Sarah has made for herself. It is still possible to see clearly in their life narratives the connection and indeed the continuity with the past, and even their hope for the future, without necessarily invoking the concept of the “eternal present” or claiming the ability to think with a Māori mindset.

The voices of the past do indeed echo down through four, five and six generations of the Williams family, to be heard in the present. For some the echo may barely disturb the surface, while for others it continues to resonate powerfully enough to influence their beliefs and the way they live their lives. It is appropriate in concluding to reflect upon the emotional content of these narratives. Luisa Passerini wrote that “the dialectic between myths and experience is fruitful and alternatively stirs up or is fed by the energy of emotions.”⁶⁴ It seemed to me in listening to these narratives that the dialectic between the family myth and individual experience does exactly this, simultaneously stirring up and feeding upon powerful emotions. Nor does the family myth act in isolation but synergistically with wider myths and cultural beliefs, both old and new. We have seen how the modern ideology of a bicultural nation which honours the Treaty of Waitangi reinforces the family myth and plays a crucial role in these

narratives. We have also witnessed the search for an identity grounded in this country, based on the pursuit of this ideal and enabled by the family myth in various different ways. In the narratives of Jean Maclean and Sarah Williams we have seen how the family myth acted as the pivot for escape from domesticity into public life and greater purpose, linking with the myth of the independent or rebel woman, while in Anne Seymour's case it allowed domesticity itself to be elevated to that higher purpose. Relics of the ethos of mission to the Māori were encountered in the myths of conversion, of spiritual affirmation, religious conviction and of manifest destiny. These often acted in tandem with each other, helping to explain and justify the personal life experience of these members of the family. However, in the repeated defence of Henry concerning his role in the Treaty and family land transactions, we saw how the cultural changes of the latter part of the twentieth century also challenged the myth of the special relationship with Māori, creating in these narratives a sense of unease, which, despite all protestations to the contrary, seemed to remain unresolved. Family memory and myth is important for understanding how people think about the past and view their responsibilities to past generations, and also for understanding the values they hold and try to uphold as they act in the present to shape the future for subsequent generations.

¹ John Byng-Hall, "The Power of Family Myths," interview by Paul Thompson, in *The Myths We Live By*, ed. Raphael Samuel and Paul Thompson (London: Routledge, 1990), 221.

² Natasha Burchardt, "Stepchildren's Memories: Myth, Understanding, and Forgiveness," in Samuel and Thompson, *The Myths We Live By*, 249.

³ Luisa Passerini, "Women's Personal Narratives: Myth, Experience and Emotions" in *Interpreting Women's Lives: Feminist Theory and Personal Narratives*, ed. Personal Narratives Group (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 191; Maurice Halbwachs, *Collective Memory*, trans. Francis Ditter and Vida Yazzi Ditter (New York: Harper & Row, 1980).

⁴ Peter Sykes, interview, 11 February 2000, tape 2A 5.8. All interviews were conducted by the author.

⁵ The impetus for this study arose from the Williams family reunion in 1998, celebrating 175 years since the arrival of Henry and Marianne in the Bay of Islands. Books of family history include Hugh Carleton, *The Life of Henry Williams. Archdeacon of Waimate Vol. 1* (Auckland, 1874), and *Vol. 2* (Auckland, 1877); Phyllis L. Garlick, *Peacemaker of the Tribes: Henry Williams of New Zealand* (London: The Highway Press, 1939); Sybil M. Woods, *Samuel Williams of Te Aute* (Christchurch: Pegasus Press, 1981); Lawrence M. Rogers, *Te Wiremu: A Biography of Henry Williams* (Christchurch: Pegasus Press, 1973).

⁶ Elisabeth Ludbrook, interview, 8 November 1999, tape 1B 20.8.

⁷ Halbwachs, *Collective Memory*; Alistair Thomson, *Anzac Memories. Living with the Legend* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1994), 7–11.

⁸ Carleton, *The Life of Henry Williams*. Carleton's main objective in publishing these volumes was to vindicate Henry's character, but still in 1998 the accusations swirled about. Fergus Clunie, *Historic Bay of Islands: a Driving Tour. New Zealand Historic Places Trust Register Series 3* (Auckland, 1998) portrays Henry Williams not as a hero but as a deceiver of Māori and a land grabber.

⁹ For example, Rachel Miller, interview, 21 October 1999, tape 2B 15.0; Jocelyn Raine, interview, 11 Nov 2000, tape 2A 35.3; Gerald Williams, interview, 31 August 1999, tape 1B 2.0.

¹⁰ Douglas Davies, interview, 8 October 1999, tape 3B 18.4.

¹¹ Sheila Williams, interview, 25 June 1998, tape 2A 2.8.

¹² Bruce Hutton, interview, 27 November 2000, tapes 1A 1.8, 1B 10.6–20.5, 1B 34.9, 3A 10.7, 3B 0.3.

¹³ Bob Hutton, interview, 4 April 2000, tape 1A 9.1, 14.9.

¹⁴ John Russell, interview, 9 June 2000, tape 1 B23.7.

¹⁵ Tom Reed, interview, 9 November 1999, tape 1A 1.9.

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- ¹⁶ Bill Ludbrook, interview, 21 August 1999, tape 3A 21.5.
- ¹⁷ Tom Williams, interview, 15 March 2000, tape 2B 36.0.
- ¹⁸ Nicola Grimmond, interview, 17 August 1998, tape 1B 9.2.
- ¹⁹ Sheila Williams, interview, tape 1B 33.8; Sarah Williams, interview, 24 February 2000, tape 3B 14.1.
- ²⁰ Tom Williams, interview, tape 2B 43.6; Maui Pomare was the grandson of Sir Maui Pomare (Te Ati Awa) who was an MP from 1912 to 1928, and Minister of Health. David Yerex, *They Came to Wydrop; The Beetham and Williams Families, Brancepath and Te Parae, Wairarapa 1856–1990* (Wellington, G P Print:1991).
- ²¹ Bill (HB) Williams, interview, 19 January 2000, tape 2A 22.3.
- ²² Peter Sykes, interview, 11 February 2000, tape 1A 11.2.
- ²³ Ranginui Walker, *He Tipua: The Life and Times of Sir Apirana Ngata* (Auckland: Penguin Books (NZ) Ltd, 2001), 100–06, 139, 166, 223.
- ²⁴ Garlick, *Peacemaker of the Tribes*, 57.
- ²⁵ Woods, *Samuel Williams of Te Aute*, 258.
- ²⁶ Bill Ludbrook, interview, 21 August 1999, tape 1A 28.9.
- ²⁷ Anne Seymour, interview, 6 June 2000, tape 3A 7.7.
- ²⁸ Peter Read, *Belonging: Australians, Place and Aboriginal Ownership* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press: 2000). Read addresses the attempt to overcome the sense of alienation in white settler societies by belonging to “deep time.”
- ²⁹ Tom Reed, interview, 9 November 1999, tape 1A 0.2.
- ³⁰ This land, “Pouerua,” was part of the block that had been sold to Henry Williams in 1835, and farmed by the Ludbrook family until 1989, when it was sold on the open market.
- ³¹ Bill Ludbrook, interview, 21 August 1999, tape 2A, 12.2–30.2.
- ³² James Cowan, “North New Zealand—‘The Puriri Trees are laughing with Joy,’” *New Zealand Railways Magazine* 3, no. 12 (April 1929). The Puriri tree is held to be the most plentiful of trees, an emblem of strength, durability and permanence, a place of shade for a dwelling. Taiamai is the plain of warm rich volcanic soils adjacent to the old Waimate Mission Station. Extinct volcanic cones swell up from the plains, and in some of the caverns within the craters “rest the bones of the immemorial dead.” Pouerua is one of these volcanic cones.
- ³³ Peter Sykes, interview, 11 February 2000, tape 1A 19.3.
- ³⁴ Jean Maclean, interview, 8 June 2000, tape 2B 23.9.
- ³⁵ Eric Williams, interview, 2 June 2000, tapes 2A 0.2, 3A 3.0.
- ³⁶ Elisabeth Ludbrook, interview, tape 1B 40.4. The episode involving Henry Williams to which she refers is described by Rogers, *Te Wiremu*, 236–38. Although Elisabeth blames the “local town council” for this action, it was in fact the Crown (government) which was the perpetrator.
- ³⁷ Bill (WA) Williams, interview, 2 November 1999, tape 2B 11.0.
- ³⁸ Hugh McBain, interview, 12 June 1998, tape 1B 36.5.
- ³⁹ Hugh McBain, interview, 12 June 1998, tape 2A 0.2.
- ⁴⁰ Peter Sykes, interview, 11 February 2000, tape 1A 31.5–33.9.
- ⁴¹ Nicola Grimmond, interview, 17 August 1998, tape 2A 39.1, 45.2; tape 3A 19.0.
- ⁴² Jean Maclean, interview, 8 June 2000, tape 1A 10.2–34.5.
- ⁴³ Jean Maclean, interview, 8 June 2000, tape 2A 40.0.
- ⁴⁴ Jean Maclean, interview, 8 June 2000, tape 2A 17.4.
- ⁴⁵ Rob Reed, interview, 11 November 1999, tape 1A 6.6.
- ⁴⁶ Rob Reed, interview, 11 November 1999, tape 1A 20.0.
- ⁴⁷ Sarah Williams, interview, 24 February 2000, tape 4A 2.5.
- ⁴⁸ Karl Hutton, interview, 2 September 2000, tape 2A 36.4.
- ⁴⁹ Karl Hutton, interview, 2 September 2000, tape 2A 7.3.
- ⁵⁰ Karl Hutton, interview, 2 September 2000, tape 2B 27.3.
- ⁵¹ Karl Hutton, interview, 2 September 2000, tape 2B 17.4.
- ⁵² Anne Seymour, interview, 6 June 2000, tape 1B 1.9.

⁵³ Anne Seymour, interview, 6 June 2000, tape 1B 31.5.

⁵⁴ “The Battle of Ōrākau,” Ministry for Culture and Heritage, available at <https://nzhistory.govt.nz/war/war-in-waikato/battle-of-orakau>. Ahumai was the daughter of Te Paerata of Ngati Raukawa who signed the Treaty of Waitangi at Waikato Heads in April 1840. Father and daughter were both present at Orakau when the 300 defenders had run out of water, food and ammunition and the British offered them a chance of surrender.

⁵⁵ Sarah Williams, interview, 24 February 2000, tape 3B 2.9. Sarah recalls seeing a sign saying “Defense de fumer” in Auckland airport in the early 1970s at the time when the French were conducting nuclear tests at Mururoa.

⁵⁶ Sarah Williams, interview, 24 February 2000, tape 3B 20.9, tape 3A 19.5.

⁵⁷ Sarah Williams, interview, 24 February 2000, tape 4A 43.3.

⁵⁸ Sarah Williams, interview, 24 February 2000, tape 4A 15.4.

⁵⁹ Sarah Williams, interview, 24 February 2000, tape 2B 2.5.

⁶⁰ Eviator Zerubavel, *Time Maps: Collective Memory and the Social Shape of the Past* (Chicago, Chicago University Press: 2003), 37–40, 45–52. Zerubavel discusses the integration of past and present which allows us to “mentally transform a series of non-contiguous points in time into seemingly unbroken historical continua,” and the importance of tradition as a ritualized effort to integrate past and present, and of historical reenactments to do so through imitation.

⁶¹ Sarah Williams, interview, 24 February 2000, tape 2B 2.5.

⁶² Sarah Williams, interview, 24 February 2000, tape 5A 11.0.

⁶³ Dr Nepia Mahuika, email messages to the author, 18 September 2019, 19 September 2019, 10 November 2019.

⁶⁴ Passerini, “Women’s Personal Narratives,” 196.