



UTS  
ePRESS

## Public History Review

Vol. 29, 2022



© 2022 by the author(s). This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0) License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), allowing third parties to copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format and to remix, transform, and build upon the material for any purpose, even commercially, provided the original work is properly cited and states its license.

**Citation:** McKergow, F., Watson, G., Littlewood, D., Neill, C. 2022. Ako: Learning from History? *Public History Review*, 29, 38–43. <https://doi.org/10.5130/phrj.v29i0.8448>

ISSN 1833-4989 | Published by UTS ePRESS | <https://epress.lib.uts.edu.au/journals/index.php/phrj>

INTRODUCTION (PUBLIC HISTORY IN AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND)

## Ako: Learning from History?

Fiona McKergow\*, Geoff Watson, David Littlewood, Carol Neill

**Corresponding author:** Fiona McKergow, [f.mckergow@gmail.com](mailto:f.mckergow@gmail.com)

**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5130/phrj.v29i0.8448>

**Article History:** Published 06/12/2022

we never knew  
about Parihaka  
it was never  
taught anywhere  
except maybe  
around the fires  
of Parihaka  
itself at night  
when stories  
are told  
of the soldiers  
who came  
with guns  
to haul us up  
by the roots  
like trees  
from our land  
though the prophets  
called peace peace  
it was never  
taught at school  
it was all hushed up  
how we listened  
to the prophets  
Tohu, Te Whiti  
who called peace 'Rire rire  
Paimarire'

but the only  
 peace the soldiers  
 knew  
 spoke through  
 the barrels  
 of their guns  
 threatening  
 our women children  
 it was never  
 taught or spoken  
 how we  
 were shackled  
 led away to the caves  
 and imprisoned  
 for ploughing our land

Apirana Taylor's poem 'Parihaka', drawn from his 2009 collection *A Canoe in Midstream: Poems Old and New*, acknowledges the ancestral pain at the heart of history in Aotearoa New Zealand.<sup>1</sup> It takes readers directly to 'the fires of Parihaka' to lay bare how history has been taught – or not taught – in the nation's schools over many generations. Prophets Te Whiti-o-Rongomai and Tohu Kākahi established a community in Taranaki in 1866 with the intention of setting themselves apart from British colonial rule. Their political and spiritual leadership rested on living by their own laws and faith. Confiscated land was reclaimed by the community of 300 by ploughing and sowing crops and many arrests were to follow. On 5 November 1881, Parihaka was surrounded and occupied by 1,600 armed constabulary and volunteer militia led by Native Minister, John Bryce. Under instruction from Te Whiti and Tohu the residents of Parihaka, by now numbering more than 1,300, demonstrated no resistance: 'Be patient and steadfast, and even if the bayonet comes to your breast do not resist.'<sup>2</sup> Known as te rā o te pahua, or the day of plunder, the legacies of Parihaka have become more widely known across Aotearoa New Zealand with the passing of the 2017 Parihaka Reconciliation Bill. An official apology has been delivered by Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern and financial redress has been negotiated.

Our special issue of *Public History Review* focuses on public history in Aotearoa New Zealand. It derives from papers presented at 'Ako: Learning from History?', the 2021 New Zealand Historical Association (NZHA) conference held by Massey University Te Kunenga Ki Pūrehuroa. The term 'ako' signifies customary Māori educative processes that are centred on Māori epistemologies and applies to reciprocal modes of teaching and learning in all areas of life. From 2023, the teaching and learning of history is set to enter a period of profound change with the introduction of Aotearoa New Zealand's Histories/Te Takanga o Te Wā, a new curriculum for children aged five to fifteen that will be taught in highly localised ways within schools and kura (schools in which lessons are primarily taught in te reo Māori). When the New Zealand government agreed that Aotearoa New Zealand's histories would be compulsory for this age group in a landmark decision taken in 2019, the practice of public history in this country entered a new and rapidly evolving phase of development.

The New Zealand government has been involved in the production of what is now known as public history since the mid-nineteenth century, that is, right from the outset of its own establishment. Key nation-forming events of this time include the signing of He Whakaputanga/Declaration of Independence (1835-39), Te Tiriti o Waitangi/Treaty of Waitangi in 1840 and the introduction of self-governance with the passing of the 1852 New Zealand Constitution Act. It is revealing that history and colonisation are stitched together in the person of Governor George Grey, whose governorships (1845-53; 1860-68) are noted for fostering significant historical research as well as ruthless confiscation of vast tracts of Māori

land. Ngāti Rangiwewehi scholar and leader, Wiremu Maihi Te Rangikāheke, in whose name the NZHA has held a biennial lecture since 2011, produced numerous manuscripts while in Grey's employment prior to 1854.<sup>3</sup> John White, a self-taught scholar and linguist, who also attracted Grey's attention, was commissioned to write a six-volume history of Māori in the 1880s.<sup>4</sup>

Major government-funded historical projects of the early twentieth century were the official history of the First World War, which ran to five volumes, alongside a history of the New Zealand Wars (1845–1870) prepared by James Cowan in the 1920s.<sup>5</sup> The Centennial Branch of the Department of Internal Affairs was formed to produce a suite of publications for the nation's centennial celebrations in 1940. Since the Department's War History Branch was formed in 1945, there has been continuous government support for historical research with a public purpose. Major projects, initiated in 1983 and 2001 respectively, are the *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography* (DNZB) and *Te Ara: The Encyclopedia of New Zealand*. A new ministry, Manatū Taonga, the Ministry for Culture and Heritage, has been responsible for the production of publicly funded history since 2000. An extensive five-year First World War centenary programme was undertaken in which activities included official ceremonies, the building of a national memorial park as well as numerous publications, exhibitions, films, artworks and archival projects. A new national day, Te Pūtake o te Riri, He Rā Maumahara, was established in 2016 to commemorate the New Zealand Wars.

Texts commissioned to complement New Zealand's 1990 Sesquicentennial commemorations of the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi were influential in engendering 'a growing cultural nationalism' among New Zealanders.<sup>6</sup> Among these, the DNZB, edited by Prof W. H. Oliver (1983-90) and Dame Claudia Orange (1990-2003), was the single most significant public history project of the late twentieth century. A focus on individual achievement was tempered by the inclusion of representative individuals from many fields. Over 3,000 biographies representing New Zealanders in diverse walks of life were produced. Among these were 500 biographies of Māori individuals, prepared in English and translated into te reo Māori by Tairongo Amoamo and Angela Ballara. This was a ground-breaking effort that seeded a burgeoning literature in te reo Māori, both in print and online. The DNZB was launched on its own website in 2001 and integrated into *Te Ara: The Encyclopedia of New Zealand* in 2010.<sup>7</sup> Digitisation allows a deeper cross-hatching of connections and influences than the original print volumes and integration into *Te Ara* provides further context for those lives.

Since 1985 an ongoing process of historical redress for Māori has given rise to an equally substantial body of research that is publicly available in the form of Waitangi Tribunal reports. Initially founded in 1975 to address contemporary claims by Māori against the Crown, the Tribunal has, since amending legislation awarded it retrospective powers ten years later, investigated deep-seated historical grievances such as those relating to Parihaka. These include the removal of indigenous authority and custodianship over land, water and other natural resources and the systematic erosion of culture, including language. The process of investigating these claims has generated detailed block histories relating to virtually every piece of land in Aotearoa New Zealand. Moreover, the process of conducting this research has provided employment opportunities for a generational cohort of historians. Settlements have now been made with most iwi and in the wake of this development some are choosing to produce their own innovative forms of public history.

Meanwhile an earlier emphasis on lives as they were lived in the public domain – at the expense of private lives – has revealed the potential for the family contexts in which individuals operated to be brought to the fore. Family history is without doubt the most widely practiced form of historical research that takes place in Aotearoa New Zealand and it takes many forms. Closely guarded whakapapa books held on marae are now complemented by open access websites, such as whakapapaonline.com, and those that require registration with an iwi based on whakapapa. Pākehā family history research bears little similarity to the processes of establishing whakapapa in te ao Māori. Genealogists find a sense of structure and purpose in notions of descent and kinship and localities associated with departures and arrivals, but driven by

commercial tools such as Ancestry, it often branches thinly across time and space, rather than towards the deep sense of belonging associated with *turangawaewae*.

Increasingly, the ready availability of sources is at once an enormous benefit and a methodological challenge for those engaged in public history. On the one hand, thanks to the success of *Papers Past* – a digital repository of newspapers, magazines, letters, journals, parliamentary papers and books dating from 1840 to 1970 – historians have instant access to literally millions of pieces of information on virtually all aspects of Aotearoa New Zealand’s history. Detailed historical research is no longer the preserve of a committed few dedicating hours of their time to scrolling through microfilm. On the other hand, it might be argued there is a risk that the ready availability of text has come at the expense of context. Because it is so easy to find references to particular events, members of the public can easily find a few, interesting quotes courtesy of a search engine and feel that the history has been ‘done’ because the sources ‘speak for themselves’. With New Zealand history being taught in schools and digital resources likely to feature heavily in course materials, there is a greater need than ever for public understanding of how to interpret historical sources.<sup>8</sup>

There are close to 500 museums in Aotearoa New Zealand.<sup>9</sup> On the whole, they tend to resist large scale historical narrative. This is especially true of volunteer-run museums situated in smaller centres. The usual mode of museum history is the vignette derived from discrete collections with particular historical or aesthetic value to a locality. Overviews of the histories of regions tend to maintain a distance between *tangata whenua* (people of the land) and *tangata tiriti* (people here by means of the Treaty) galleries. A disinclination to present ambitious or challenging stories is in part an outcome of the reliance of museums on limited sources of public funding. History collections are often dominated by artefacts from British migrant families, businesses and communities. Many of the tenets that underpin Māori ways of being have been integrated into museum practice in the past half century, yet even national institutions remain wary of addressing difficult histories and by and large maintain an upbeat and celebratory approach to the past.<sup>10</sup>

The articles selected for this volume reflect a growing diversity in both the conceptualisation and forms of public history in New Zealand. First, they reveal the topicality of New Zealand history and the intention to understand the diverse histories of New Zealand without necessarily needing to locate them in a globalised context. Second, history has become increasingly democratised. The government, while still important, is not the primary producer of public history, which now tends to be driven by localised community interests. The articles foreground relationships and connections between people and place, rather than being centred on state-defined ‘significant events’. They have a common focus on specific communities telling their own stories and sometimes departing from established orthodoxies in doing so.

The collection begins with an article adapted from the 2021 Wiremu Maihi Te Rangikaheke lecture. By drawing on the example of his *tūpuna* (ancestors) from *Te Tauihu o te Waka a Māui* (northern South Island), Peter Meihana opens the special issue with an analysis of how Māori have used past events for present-day purposes. In ‘Navigating the Politics of Remembering’ readers are also shown how Māori have utilised oral traditions and archaeological research to assist in Treaty claims and to press for the return of their *taonga*, alongside using *whare tupuna* and *pou whenua* to turn European memorials into bicultural sites.

The importance of familial connections in and beyond Aotearoa New Zealand lies at the heart of the two articles that follow. In ‘*Tupuna Wahine, Saina, Tupuna Vaine, Matua Tupuna Fifine, Mapiāg Hāni: Grandmothers in the Archives*’ a group of six indigenous scholars – Hineitimoana Greensill, Mere Taito, Jessica Pasisi, Jesi Lujan Bennett, Marylise Dean and Maluseu Monise – gather together in friendship and hospitality from across *Te Moana Nui a Kiwa* to explore the voices of their grandmothers as indigenous storytellers. The *tagata Niue* authors of ‘*Niue Fakahoamotu Nukutuluea Motutefua Nukutuluea: Critical Discussions of Niue History in and Beyond Aotearoa New Zealand*’ – Jessica Pasisi, Zoë Catherine

Lavatangaloa Henry, Ioane Aleke Fa'avae, Rennie Atfield-Douglas, Birtha Lisimoni Togahai, Toliain Makaola, Zora Feilo and Asetoa Sam Pilisi – demonstrate further that public history in a nation of migrants should not be constrained by geographic boundaries.

In the next sequence of articles, the theme of relationships continues with a shift of focus to specific landforms. Aotearoa is a land of many harbours. Marama Muru-Lanning, Keri Mills, Ngāhuia Harrison, Gerald Lanning and Charmaine Tukiri apply the concept of *kaitiakitanga* to three highly significant harbours – Kāwhia (including Aotea), Whāngārei and Manukau (including Ihumatao) – as ‘critically important and threatened environments’. Aotearoa New Zealand is also a land of many mountains, stretching from Te Raupua and Tutamoe in Te Tai Tokerau to Hananui on Rakiura. Lee Davidson offers a description of how Pākehā viewed mountains as without culture, there to be named, mapped and known for the purposes of tourism, in contrast to conceptions of ancestral maunga for Māori. Ewan Morris takes a case study approach that considers the contests over the name of Taranaki Maunga as they have played out through public debates and political decision making since the 1970s.

Another suite of articles address public history in its varied institutional settings: schools, museums, state care facilities and department stores. Analysis of the new history curriculum in schools is a significant endeavour for public historians and two articles explore different aspects of teaching history. In ‘Consulting the Past: Creating a National History Curriculum in Aotearoa New Zealand’, Carol Neill, Michael Belgrave and Genaro Olivera, compare responses to the new Aotearoa New Zealand Histories curriculum from historians, teachers and the public. Canvassing past, present and future, Liana MacDonald introduces and explores the concept of *channelling a haunting* with a group of trainee secondary school teachers visiting history exhibitions at national institutions. Difficult histories of a different kind are canvassed by Hilary Stace, who highlights the importance of the voices of the disabled in the public’s engagement with disability history. Through her examination of a rooftop playground and the materteral figure of ‘Aunt Hayzl’, Katie Pickles explores how the fantastical elements of public memory and nostalgia are upheld in urban retail environments.

Most of the authors in this volume focus on public histories that pertain to relationships between people and place, defined here as unique blends of physical and cultural elements. By contrast, the authors of the articles that conclude this volume turn the spotlight on two important modes of public history: digital public history and historical fiction. With reference to the Soldiers of Empire project, which provides a database of British Army soldiers who served in Aotearoa New Zealand during the 1860s, Rebecca Lenihan argues in favour of the democratising effects of making digital history accessible to the public. In ‘Interpreting History Through Fiction’ Thom Conroy, Joanna Grochowicz and Christina Sanders discuss the genre of historical fiction in which the story element of history is their imaginative gateway to the past.

Together the articles in this issue provide a snapshot of public history as it is practiced in Aotearoa New Zealand today. When compared with *Going Public: The Changing Face of New Zealand History*, a volume on the state of the field edited by Bronwyn Dalley and Jock Phillips in 2001, the most striking development is one of increased inclusivity in terms of who is engaged in public history. Twenty years ago, there was a focus in public history circles on how history was delivered for ‘the public’ – be that through a historic site, television programme, official war history, museum exhibition, website, reference text, or Waitangi Tribunal working paper.<sup>11</sup> Indigenous historians from Aotearoa me Te Wai Pounamu and Te Moana-nui-a-Kiwa are now shaping public history in their own ways, especially through an emphasis on storytelling methodologies and histories made within the many contexts of kinship.

Finally, we might consider the maturing of public history in the region by reflecting on a question posed by David Dean: ‘What do we have in mind when we speak of history *for, by, with* or *about* the public?’<sup>12</sup> Taken as a whole the contributions to this issue span these stances in relation to their respective ‘publics’, suggesting a rich field from which to move forward into the future and a unity with his view that ‘all history

is public history' in one sense or another.<sup>13</sup> But 'good history' involves learning from history; 'good history' involves ako.

## Endnotes

- 1 Reproduced with permission from Apirana Taylor, *A Canoe in Midstream: Poems Old and New*, Canterbury University Press, Christchurch, 2009, pp60-61.
- 2 *Evening Post*, 7 November 1881, p2. For further details, see *Waitangi Tribunal Report: Kaupapa Tuatahi*, Legislation Direct, Wellington, 1996; Hazel Riseborough, *Days of Darkness: Taranaki, 1878-1884*, rev ed, Penguin, Auckland, 2002; Rachel Buchanan, *The Parihaka Album: Lest We Forget*, Huia, Wellington, 2009; Atholl Anderson, Judith Binney and Aroha Harris, *Tangata Whenua: An Illustrated History*, Bridget Williams Books, Wellington, 2014; Rachel Buchanan, *Ko Taranaki Te Maunga*, Bridget Williams Books, Wellington, 2018.
- 3 J. Curnow, 1990, Te Rangikāheke, Wiremu Maihi (Online). Available: <https://teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/1t66/te-rangikaheke-wiremu-maihi> (Accessed 2 September 2022).
- 4 Michael Reilly, 'John White: The Making of a Nineteenth-Century Writer and Collector of Maori Tradition', *New Zealand Journal of History*, vol 23, no 2 (1989), pp169-70.
- 5 For a fuller discussion of public history in New Zealand see Bronwyn Dalley and Jock Phillip (eds), *Going Public: The Changing Face of New Zealand History*, Auckland University Press, Auckland, 2001, especially the chapters by Bronwyn Dalley, 'Finding the Common Ground: New Zealand's Public History', pp16-29; Chris Hilliard, 'A Prehistory of Public History: Monuments, Explanations and Promotions, 1900-70', pp30-54; and Peter Gibbons and Jeanine Graham, 'Adventures in Scholarship: State-Sponsored Reference Works, 1940-2000', pp74-90.
- 6 Dalley and Phillips, op cit, p11.
- 7 See Dictionary of New Zealand Biography (Online). Available: <https://teara.govt.nz/en/dnzb> (Accessed 2 September 2022).
- 8 Caroline Daley, 'Papers from the Past, and Problems from the Present', *Turnbull Library Record*, vol 43, no 1, 2010, pp64-72.
- 9 See Museums Aotearoa Homepage (Online). Available: <https://www.museumsaotearoa.org.nz/> (Accessed 2 September 2022).
- 10 Carol Neill, Elizabeth Ward, Keri Cheetham, Michael Belgrave and Peter Meihana, 'Aotearoa NZ Regional Resources Stocktake: Milestone Report August 2022', Report Commissioned by the Ministry of Education, Wellington, 2022.
- 11 Dalley and Phillips, op cit, p9.
- 12 David Dean, 'Publics, Public Historians and Participatory Public History', in Joanna Wojdon and Dorota Wiśniewska (eds), *Public in Public History*, Routledge, New York, 2021, p2.
- 13 *ibid*, p13.

# Public History in Aotearoa New Zealand

McKergow, F

2022-12-01

---

<http://hdl.handle.net/10179/17997>

*17/01/2023 - Downloaded from MASSEY RESEARCH ONLINE*