

**DR LOUIS HAUTI POTAKA**  
**OF NEW ZEALAND**  
**A BIOGRAPHICAL ESSAY**

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## PREFACE

This portrait of Louis Hauti Potaka is in no sense a “memoir”: I did not meet or know Louis, neither do I have any personal knowledge of the situations and events which he experienced or in which he was involved; and I have met or corresponded with fewer than a dozen persons who had met or known him - and with perhaps one or two exceptions, none of them could claim to have known him intimately and for any extended period.

As far as I know, there are but two items – a letter written by Louis (actually, he typed it, in 1936) and a short cablegram - that could be considered significant “primary” source material; so I have had to depend overwhelmingly on “secondary” (and often, if you will, “tertiary”) sources. But I should say that I have no more reason to doubt the authenticity of letters, and cablegrams, and documents and reports about Louis and his life than I have to question his signed 1936 letter (or Admiral Byrd’s replies, by letter and cable, to it), in the archives. As for the accuracy and reliability of the factual information in my sources, with very few exceptions (including one statement in Louis’ typed letter), I have accepted what “they wrote, said or reported”, though I can’t vouch for its veracity – and, indeed, in most instances there has been no way for me to verify the information (from dates and names to anecdotes). Doubtless, the reader will have an opinion as to whether I am depending on source materials that are “more reliable” or “less reliable” - and he/she will have no problem distinguishing between fact and “opinion”(and whose opinion is being reported) in my narrative.

Certainly, I trust, the reader will easily discern when I am expressing my opinion, and/or speculating - and, above all, when I’m using my imagination, and a little fiction creeps in - as when I imagine how three young immigrants to New Zealand felt on arrival in 1887, in the first sentence of Section 2; and when I imagine Dr Louis Potaka and his friend David Mason interacting in Takaka in 1935 and 1936, in the early paragraphs of Section 7.

My “biographical essay” of Louis owes much to many persons and institutions and their assistance is recorded in Appendix 1. The involvement of many of them is also noted, more specifically, in the first section of the essay (*Introduction*) as I relate how the investigation proceeded, and where. But as the reader will discover, I do not identify in the essay the precise source of every quotation and every recollection, and this is because one or two contributors (“informants”) specifically requested not to be cited as the source of the information, anecdotes, opinions and suggestions they provided for possible inclusion in my essay.

Although I have been enquiring about the life of Louis Potaka for more than sixteen years and I have acquired or made copies of several important documents and many letters and radiograms, and have well over a hundred letters and faxes and e-mail messages sent to me since the mid-1990s, I did not begin my research earlier enough to stand a strong chance of gathering all the information, anecdotes and documents that I

would liked to have had when composing the essay. And so it's true that this portrait – or the story of Louis' life - is incomplete, is somewhat fragmentary.

And readers will realise how fragmentary it is when they find that the essay is littered with questions and that I do frequently indulge in conjecture and speculation. If we had answers to the questions listed in Appendix 3 (Unanswered Questions) the biographer could write with more certainty and accuracy about Louis Potaka – about the events in Louis' life, what sort of person he was, the decisions he made, and who influenced him and what drove him.

Because the flow of new information had shrunk to a mere trickle by late-1998 and the prospects for unearthing additional information seemed to be fading fast, I was debating in early 1999 whether it was time to produce a final version of the essay, when in March I received a fax from Patricia Kennedy, a great niece of Louis. She had been reading the latest draft of the essay and reviewing my list of “unanswered questions”. “What a shame you haven't had any more information “, she commented; and then added “It must be long gone”.

When that thought sunk in, I resolved to compose the final version (or what I thought would be the final version) of my essay – and I set myself a deadline of December 31, 1999. The last day of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century seemed a good choice, though I suppose I might have procrastinated until March 14, 2001, the centenary of Louis' birth.

In any event, the December, 1999, version with its nine “sections” and three appendices was completed in early 2000 and distributed to several interested persons. And then, after a lengthy hiatus, during which I received two or three interesting messages of some relevance, in mid-2004 I revisited my 1999 essay; and began correcting more than a handful of minor errors and adding a word, a name, a clause and a sentence here and there – and several new paragraphs (as I mention near the end of my *Introduction*). I saw no reason, however, to increase the number of sections or to compose or compile additional appendices.

I concluded the revision process in late 2004, and then sent copies of the revised biographical essay to several individuals. And I anticipated that my “Potaka Biography Project” would soon finally end - with the distribution of copies of the essay as an “unpublished manuscript” to libraries that had indicated an interest in having the essay in their collections.

However, prompted by the receipt of further information in mid-2005 (including material that I felt should be integrated into Section 6), and enlightened somewhat by further discussions about Potaka's snowblindness in 1934 while he was in the Antarctic, I revised the essay for a second time (and wrote a new final question for Appendix 3).

And then, in January, 2006, at the suggestion of the Archivist at The Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio, USA, I was pleased to transmit the December, 2005, revision to Columbus for inclusion in OSU's **Knowledge Bank**. Individuals and

institutions everywhere now have access to the essay; and it may well be that more information about Dr Potaka will be forthcoming. And perhaps some reader – a student, maybe, interested in *Maori Studies*, *Polar History* or *Medical History* - will be moved to attempt a more substantial biography of Dr Louis Potaka, something more than my fragmentary portrait.

## ***1: Introduction***

Readers who are anxious to know about Louis Potaka are advised to skip this first section of my essay and proceed directly to Section 2 *Family and Early Years*. If it is Dr Potaka's service with Admiral Byrd's Antarctic Expedition in 1934-35 that is their only interest, then they may go straight to Section 4 *Antarctic Experience*. If their immediate concern is the demise of Louis they might wish to proceed directly to Section 7 (*Tragic Death*) If they are especially interested in illustrations, before reading any text they might choose to refer to Appendix 2 (Illustrations). It is certainly possible to postpone labouring through this introduction!

In this first section of the essay I explain how I came to be interested in Dr Louis Potaka, how my interest in him shifted over time, and how I attempted to get answers to the questions that seemed important when I decided to attempt a biography of him. How and where the research or enquiry proceeded and how and when some of the information and ideas came to light are clarified; and the discussion closes with my latest thoughts on Louis. Many whose assistance and contributions are acknowledged in Appendix 1 make an appearance in the section.

I am keenly aware that there are many who are interested in Louis Potaka's life and work because he was a family member. Some of those family members have the surname Potaka – including the male descendants of Louis Potaka's uncles and male descendants of his two younger brothers. Some would have other names – and these would include descendants of Louis' aunts and of three of his four sisters. Others are Caselbergs (from Louis' mother's side). And then there are the female descendants of Caselbergs with other surnames. Many, many relatives, whose surnames do not suggest a connection with Louis – nieces and nephews, first cousins, and cousins in the more general sense, and so forth. In some instances I struggled a little when sorting out the family connections! And I am quite certain there that there are many others out there that I know nothing about. Be that as it may, I hope family members, known or unknown to me, and however close to or distant from Louis, will find something of interest in this biographical essay of Louis.

Clearly, my interest is not as a family member. Neither is it as a member of Louis' more extended family. And here I am referring to his Maori family; from the immediate associations – Louis' paternal grandfather, Utiku Potaka, was a Hauiti tribal chief and Louis' middle name of Hauiti connects him with the Te Runanga o Ngati Hauiti, his tribal authority – to Maoris in general. And I feel sure that many persons in that wider family will be interested in this portrait of Louis Potaka.

And neither does my interest in Louis Potaka stem from being a pakeha, a fellow New Zealander. But we are getting closer, in a sense. And in fact my interest did begin because my father's younger brother migrated from England to New Zealand (and was a proud Kiwi from the 1920s until his death in Auckland in 1966). Harry Richard Young (known as Bob Young) was on the *City of New York* with American Admiral Richard E.

Byrd in 1929-1930, and was one of the Ice Party that wintered over with the Admiral on the Second Byrd Antarctic Expedition (BAE2) in 1933-35. And it was with BAE2 that Dr Louis Potaka served as the medical officer, from February, 1934, to February, 1935.

Now, I cannot say that as a five-year old I heard about Dr Potaka's involvement with BAE2 when my Uncle Bob came to London, England, from the Byrd family home in Maine, USA, in late 1935. It was decades later, when enquiring into my uncle's participation in BAE1 and BAE2, that I first became interested in Dr Louis Potaka. Regrettably I had procrastinated with my questions for Uncle Bob - and though my younger brother spent time with him when he was an exchange teacher in New Zealand in the 1960s - I never had a serious conversation with Bob or wrote him from my home in South Africa, before he suddenly died, in 1966. And shortly thereafter I had the most urgent question for my late uncle: Did you really keep a diary in 1934-1935 (concerning BAE2) and if so, what arrangements did you make for it after your death?

Our search for Bob Young's diary and Bob-related Antarctic papers is another story. But wherever we went - the National Archives in Washington, D.C.; the Canterbury Museum in Christchurch; the Hocken Library in Dunedin; the Byrd Polar Research Center (BPRC) in Columbus, Ohio; to the homes of BAE2 survivors in Indiana (Dr Alton A. Lindsey), Pennsylvania (Olin Stancliff), and Massachusetts (Stevenson Corey) - Dr Potaka's involvement in BAE2 came up. Alas, just as I had postponed quizzing Uncle Bob about the Antarctic, so I postponed inquiring specifically about Dr Potaka in the mid-1980s, and again when Jackie Druery and I were in New Zealand in 1988; and many persons who could have helped then with a biography of Louis Potaka are no longer with us.

In the USA there were more of his BAE2 companions alive in 1988 than the three I met and the three others that I corresponded with (Joe Hill, Bill McCormick and Charles Murphy - who was at the centre of everything that went on during BAE2, and who could certainly have told me a great deal about Dr Potaka, had I asked, when I wrote to him in 1985 about Bob Young). Richard Black, Bud Waite and Dr Earle Perkins were three other survivors of BAE2 that I might have quizzed about Potaka in the Antarctic, but didn't.

In New Zealand, Louis' sister Nukuteaio Selina was living until 1986 and his brother Wirihina Wilson until the late 1980s. And doubtless several if not many friends, colleagues and patients from his days in Utiku, Wanganui, Dunedin, Murchison, Nelson and Takaka were alive in the 1980s and 1990s.

Of course, an even earlier start with enquiries into the life of Louis would have afforded one the opportunity to speak with, or contact, a host of his contemporaries. Admiral Byrd (who died in 1957) and Byrd's second-in-command Dr Thomas Poulter (alive in the 1970s) could have told us more of Potaka's work (and pastimes) in Little America and conversations they had with him. And how much we would have learned from Louis' immediate family - from his mother Esther, who outlived her eldest son by over twenty-five years; and from his six siblings, and from his Uncle Wilson and Aunt

Ada, amongst many others. Then, we could have contacted his Utiku and Wanganui schoolmates; his teachers at Wanganui; his professors, team mates and fellow students at Otago Medical School; the men in the photograph (noted in Appendix 2) that Mr Bert Spiers provided showing the young Dr Potaka in the hills of the Murchison area soon after the June 1929 earthquake; Captain A.L. Nelson and the other two British naval officers in the photograph (also noted in Appendix 2) that Mrs Jane Baird of the Golden Bay Museum sent that shows the newly-recruited doctor for BAE2 being welcomed about *Discovery II*; his Takaka farmer friend David Mason (who died in 1966) whom he persuaded, in October, 1936, to stop on Takaka Hill so that he could burn some papers, and Hubert Page also of Takaka, said by some to be the cause of “the trouble”; Nelson pharmacist H.F. West, who was Potaka’s executor; and the several persons, medical and otherwise, who would have had direct knowledge of Dr Potaka (including Murchison County Council Chairman Stewart and Louis’ Murchison friend John Downie; Dr Edward Coventry (Ed) Bydder, Sister Lynda Hyland, and Nurses Bethune and Helen Winter of Takaka; Drs James P.S. Jamieson, Frank Hudson, D.C. (Port) Low and Percy Brunette of Nelson; Dr W.B. Andrew of Collingwood and later Motueka; and Dr Alan Green of Moteuka, who was the first to attend to Potaka on October 2, 1936). We could expect that the doctors, in particular, would have been able (though not necessarily willing!) to provide information (and insights) of value to a layman biographer fumbling for the truth!

And as for documents and letters and papers that are missing today – think what might have come to light (had one been searching) four or five decades ago (in the 1950s and 1960s) – or even two or three! Perhaps certain letters and submissions noted in the minutes of 1936 meetings of the Nelson Division of the New Zealand Branch of the British Medical Association (BMA); perhaps the records of Dr Potaka’s own physicians (whoever they may have been) - and we would have been especially interested in his ophthalmologist’s ocular history of Louis, if, indeed, he was examined by one, both before and after his sojourn in Antarctica.

But let me hasten to say that despite my late start (in 1990) and then delaying my serious enquiries for another several years (during which time I had other things to do!), I have had important contributions for this essay from five or six older folk who did remember Louis as a boy, and as a medical student in Dunedin, and as a doctor, and as a member of BAE2 (including Corey, Stancliff and Hill and young pilot Bill McCormick who “really wrecked his plane” and got to know Dr Potaka as well as anybody during the six weeks he was flat on his back; and Dr A.A. Lindsey, who mentions Potaka several times in his unpublished diary). And, of course, contributions from persons in New Zealand who recall their late parents, spouses and relatives speaking about Louis.

Unlike Bob Young who spoke in a press interview in England in 1935 of “keeping a diary” while with BAE2 (and who wrote a long narrative account of BAE2 for his relatives in England in which he states he is extracting the more interesting details from “my diary”), Louis Potaka, as far as I know, never spoke of keeping a diary (or kept a diary) – of his pre-BAE2 days, for his year with BAE2 at Little America, or for the turbulent eighteen months after returning to New Zealand from the Antarctic. (But I



would not be surprised to learn that he did, in fact, keep a daily journal while at Little America – as most, if not all, of his fellow explorers did).

As I suggested to Mr Neville Lomax who sent me his brief 1996 essay on Dr Potaka, how we biographers would be helped in our task of reconstructing events and establishing the chronology and “explaining” the decisions if diaries written by his relative Dr L.H.Potaka were to materialise! And the more intimate and candid those diaries, the more important they would very likely be - if we want to understand Louis (what motivated him; what concerned him; what his plans were; and so forth). Perhaps we could confirm that he actually posed the questions to his dying father’s doctor that I have imagined the distraught young Louis did (in Section 2). Perhaps we would have answers to the question I ask about the impact of his Jewish origins. And what would he have written about his own persistent ultraviolet keratitis (snowblindness)? And we would surely have some clues as to his relationship with his mother - and his feelings toward his Takaka friend Floss Winter (the daughter of Hansen Winter of Takaka, and many years after Louis’ death the first wife of Dr Percy Brunette). And we might know, and not be compelled to speculate, about his state of mind in 1935 and 1936 - also whether his final act, on October 2, 1936, was premeditated.

But to return to the development of my particular interest in Dr Potaka. Very early on, in my teens perhaps, I was intrigued when reading in Admiral Byrd’s account of BAE2 in DISCOVERY (published in 1935 by G.P Putnam’s Sons of New York)) about the doctor Louis replaced on BAE2 – Dr Guy Shirey. And I was even more intrigued when, decades later, I learned in the archival papers in Columbus, Ohio, that Guy Shirey was a man of immense experience, medically and militarily. And that he had toiled long and hard at the Admiral’s side to help organise BAE2 months and months before it even left the USA – and that when the expedition’s supply vessel *Jacob Ruppert* tied up to the Ross Ice Shelf (the Barrier) in January, 1934, in the Bay of Whales near Little America, within a few days he declared himself unable to stay and serve. And when I was told that he could not face going ashore and the prospect of a year or more on desolate Antarctica. That too is a different story.

But it was to lead, of course, to the critically urgent search for a replacement doctor...to a flurry of radiograms between Byrd down South (at Little America) and New Zealand, and to and from New York, Washington and London. And to Byrd being advised that there were no volunteers, but that one young doctor in Nelson who was “thoroughly capable and highly recommended” was available for a fee of 350 pounds (the messages quoted in Section 4 *Antarctic Experience* are in the Byrd Papers at the BPRC). And to Potaka sailing South from Port Chalmers on *Discovery 11* on February 15, 1934. And Guy Shirey’s withdrawal and Louis Potaka’s appointment were to lead to, in some measure, the untimely death of Louis in Nelson in October, 1936.

Shirey and Potaka were both medical doctors, but they had little else in common – except their involvement in BAE2. However, they never met (Dr Shirey left the Bay of Whales on the *Ruppert* about three weeks before Dr Potaka arrived there on the *Bear of Oakland*); and as far as I have been able to ascertain the only communication between

them was the radiogram I quote from Shirey to his young replacement on February 22, 1934 and Louis' radiogram in May to Shirey. Louis seems to have sought jobs with some adventure, but he probably never thought about doctoring in Antarctica – until the day he saw or heard about Byrd's search for a relief for Guy Shirey. What might he have written in his diary on that day? Might it have been: "Sounds like just the challenge, physically and professionally, that I need"? Or perhaps: "If they appoint me, I shall have to make arrangements for my dogs, and perhaps sell the car. And I would miss golfing and fishing, and my friends - the Wests especially"?

Byrd's first direct communication with his new relief doctor – the radiogram to *Discovery II* on February 21, 1934 - was, ironically perhaps, as you will read, on the subject of cocaine, novocaine and other narcotic drugs.

In any event, to be brief, it was in June, 1985, that my interest in Potaka was raised to a higher level (though not yet to the highest), when I received in Canada a letter from the Archivist of the Canterbury Museum.

Dr David Harrowfield was responding to a note I had had placed in *The Press* in Christchurch asking readers to contact me if they had known Bob Young and especially if they happened to have, or had seen, Bob's BAE2 diary! Harrowfield's response was the only one I received, and it did not lead to the lost diary. But the copies of the two letters he enclosed were fascinating gems. Both written by Bob Young, the originals, Harrowfield said, had been sent to the museum "just last week". My reply noted that "both add to the story in important ways". In retrospect, I might have written "to both stories" – to Bob Young's and to Louis Potaka's. And, indeed, as the reader will doubtless notice, there's a passages in one of the letters as critically significant to this essay as almost any other letter or document that has come to light.

In the letter dated February 28, 1937, Bob Young, writing to a friend in New Zealand a few days after returning from a year in Australia, said he'd just heard of the death of Dr Potaka – "he and I were decent coppers" (Canterbury Museum: MS 344). And then he reported an alarming remark by Louis during a conversation they had had in the Antarctic about snowblindness. This sent me back to Bob's BAE2 hand-written narrative; and there were, indeed, a couple of entries concerning Dr Potaka: one on January 6, 1935, and the other for January 24, 1935, shortly before BAE2 left the Antarctic. Bob recorded that Louis thought he had "ruined his eyes with too much cocaine" - and we are left wondering how much detail about Louis during that month Bob had included in his (missing) diary! In particular, did he include, and elaborate on, another remark he reported in his 1937 letter (which I reveal later, in Section 8 of this essay)?

My interest in Dr Potaka was raised a further notch or two when we were in New Zealand some three years later, in 1988. Fifty years having elapsed, we were able, we learned when in Wellington, to obtain copies of the *Depositions of Witnesses* at the 1936 Coroner's Inquest held in Nelson. And we did (J 46 COR 1936/1244).

However, I only glanced at the pages before I put them in a folder with other notes for

careful reading at some later date (they are quoted in Section 7 *Tragic Death*). And as a result I did not immediately reorganise our imminent trip to the South Island so that we would visit, and could enquire about Potaka, in Nelson, Murchison and Takaka, and see his grave in Rototai. Our negligence was even worse when we drove so close to Rata, where Louis (as I later found out) was born on March 14, 1901, and to Utiku Primary School, and even parked our “Campavan” overnight in Wanganui (where Louis was at school from 1915-1919), and failed (though ignorance) to explore and ask questions. And in Dunedin at Otago’s Hocken Library I did not focus primarily on Potaka.

And for several years I have been paying for missing those opportunities in 1988! Though I hasten to add that my research endeavours from afar – from Canada - since then have been very generously aided by several persons in New Zealand.

**Then, in 1990 or thereabouts, Dr Potaka became my number one interest** (Uncle Bob Young and Dr Guy Shirey having been eclipsed, temporarily). **And I began thinking about Louis biographically**, rather than just as a BAE2 explorer. And this came about as a result of finding and contemplating some letters and other communications during a couple of extended working sessions (in 1990 and 1993) in the archival collection of the BPRC at The Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio.

Dr Potaka’s December, 1934, memorandum to Admiral Byrd about pilot Schlossbach’ eyesight is certainly another ironical message, but of marginal importance and notable only for the fact that it is the only medical memo that I have found – and there were fifty-six men on the Ice being examined regularly (some assert), and some remarkable operations. The letters, however, in Potaka’s file at the BPRC were anything but marginal!

Dr Potaka’s April, 1936, letter to Byrd in the United States may be the only substantial extant letter by him for us to contemplate. Its authenticity is beyond doubt, and it is the keystone to the later pages of this essay. The Admiral’s June, 1936, response (also quoted in Section 6 *General Practitioner in Takaka*) also survives, in the Ohio archives; and it raises questions, as indeed do the exchanges of letters after Potaka’s death between Admiral Byrd and David Mason of Takaka and between Byrd and H.F. West of Nelson (in Section 9 *Postscript*).

These few letters - these precious few, as I was to find out – prompted me to wonder about Louis Potaka. Was he a shy loner? Could he be argumentative and feisty, and even reckless? Was he easily manipulated? When had things started to go wrong for him? Had the snowblindness in the Antarctic been so severe? Was there a history of depression? Of conflict? What was his family and educational background? What had moulded his personality, shaped his career decisions, influenced his thinking? And prompted his actions on October 2, 1936?

Now, I admit that I had moved (and have moved) somewhat away from what an academic Geographer might be expected to focus on. “People and Places” is one succinct definition of the field of Geography, and we may consider how people are influenced by

places – but we are not normally studying one individual or even a small group of individuals, and dabbling in psycho-analysis! And I leave it to the reader to decide whether, my curiosity having been aroused by Bob Young’s 1937 letter and then by the evidence deposited for the inquest on Potaka’s death and then by the several letters and messages in Potaka’s file in the Ohio archives, my attempt to seek out information, evaluate it and then compose a meaningful biography of Louis is seriously flawed.

The information I sought - that a biographer needed to know and sift through - was virtually everything and anything about Louis - from March 14, 1901, to October 2, 1936; as well as some detail about the family, and the social, ethnic/cultural, medical and political circumstances into which he fitted (and which doubtless impacted on him). Of course, I thought again of what might have been deposited in archives.

I had trawled through the Ohio archives, during two visits, but there were two files there that I thought called for review: that for Jim Sterrett, who was Dr Potaka’s assistant with BAE2, and Dr Shirey’s file. But there was nothing in the Sterrett file that threw light on Potaka’s work at Little America or his relationship with Jim. And my second review of the Ohio file on Shirey yielded little more than Shirey’s handwritten good-luck message for transmission to Potaka. I also thought that Sir Hubert Wilkins might have had personal contact with Dr Potaka in Dunedin in February, 1934, but from examining the guide to the Wilkins’ papers (also held at the BPRC), I concluded that they probably had not met (an assumption that a more diligent reader of those papers might show to be wrong!). And with the National Archives in Wellington and the Canterbury Museum in Christchurch and several libraries and museums, in Auckland and elsewhere, I drew blanks on Louis Potaka: evidently neither he nor anybody after his death had donated his papers to an archive. In Maryland, at the relocated US National Archives, there was tantalisingly little to be seen of Potaka on film (as I note in Section 4). Just as, if I recalled correctly, there had been limited mention of him in the Antarctic in *The New York Times*.

Now widely available on microfilm, the *NYT* could be easily double-checked. And there was the Sir Hubert Wilkin’s cable from Dunedin published on February 15, 1934, that first informed the world about Louis – though neither Louis’ initials nor first name were given. And then, within a month, the account from BAE2 Communications Officer Charles Murphy of “the first major operation ever performed on the Antarctic continent”. But Potaka was not one of the stars on the Ice, and seldom featured in Murphy’s almost daily reports to the *NYT*, though Byrd’s ghost-writer Murphy did refer to Potaka a number of times in DISCOVERY (as I report in Section 4).

What I could not easily check or double-check in the 1990s for any mention of Dr Potaka were the New Zealand newspapers of the early 1930s. Fortunately, in 1988 we had found and copied the very substantial piece that appeared in Dunedin’s *Evening Star* on February 19, 1935, after the return of BAE2 (“Medicos Sinecure. Dr Potaka’s Experience on Ice”); it’s possibly more revealing than anything in DISCOVERY - and one wonders what unpublished treasures were in the reporter’s notes on the interview. And one wonders what other interviews with Dr Potaka were reported in local

newspapers (both English and Maori language newspapers), both before his service with BAE2 (and especially when he was in trouble in Murchison in 1930) and after his time with Byrd (and especially in the turbulent months in Takaka in 1935 and 1936). If supporters and opponents wrote “letters to the editor” in those distant days, I have yet to see any.

Neither have I seen any report of Louis’ funeral on October 6, 1936; but we have copies of the October 3 and October 5 reports in the *Nelson Evening Mail* of the inquest on Louis. And it was Otago’s Hocken Archives that mailed us in 1996 a copy of the short Press Association obituary of Potaka, published in the *Otago Daily Times* on October 5, 1936 (the newspapers, they wrote, were too bound and too fragile to place on a photocopier; so they had used a hand-held copier). And a covering letter in my files from the Alexander Turnbull Library in Wellington indicates that long ago they located and sent me a copy of the lengthy report in *The Dominion* on October 20, 1938, concerning the award of the US Congressional Medal to New Zealanders involved with BAE2. More recently (in 1998), I received from the Nelson Provincial Museum a copy of the article in the *Nelson Evening Mail* of January 13, 1937, reporting the “lively public meeting last night” about a possible cottage hospital in Takaka. But that contact resulted from my major 1996 effort to unearth what I hoped would be important information for my biographical essay on Louis Potaka - and I should now turn to that endeavour.

Having been informed by several university departments of Maori Studies in New Zealand that they had no information on Dr L.H.Potaka, I decided in mid-1996 that I should attempt to add to the information I already had about Potaka by asking anybody who had information to contact me. As I had in 1985 for Bob Young, I would cast a net or two over the general public, using the media, and see what they caught.

And I faxed my first “letter to the editor” about Potaka to the *Nelson Evening Mail* on August 26, 1996; and it was published on September 14, 1996. In the letter I mentioned sufficient specifics – Takaka, Nelson, BAE2 and Potaka’s death in 1936 – to enable the reader to know which Dr Louis Potaka I was interested in; and I included the names of David Mason and H.F.West, of Takaka and Nelson respectively.

In October, a similar letter went to Christchurch’s *The Press*, via e-mail; and it was processed by them into a couple of paragraphs and used on October 25, 1996. The piece stated that I was a Canadian (which at the time was not true, but which probably did me no harm) – and it obligingly included my Ontario university e-mail address (which certainly was useful).

And then, through the Internet and via e-mail, I made contact with *Nga Korero O Te Wa*; and in October, 1996, Adam Gifford included an item that asked readers to share any information about, or recollections of, Dr Potaka that they had with me. (This newsletter piece generated two significant responses – one in November 1996, and the second much later in mid-2001).

What happened to two fax messages sent to *The Dominion* and *Otago Times* in that

October I never found out, but I have no evidence that either paper published my letter. How many readers noticed the letters that were used, and how many who had information considered responding but then neglected to, or decided not to do so – I shall never know! What I do know is how many responses I actually received.

And the three 1966 press “announcements” of my interest in Dr Potaka with their request for recollections and information elicited over thirty responses, all but a handful responding to the September *Nelson Evening Mail* letter.

Two or three ladies were quickly off the mark, as was Mr Bert Spiers of Murchison, and Professor Emeritus of Surveying (Otago University) John Mackie was only a day or two behind. And the flow of information continued for some weeks. It comprised regular letters, some e-mail messages and a couple of fax messages. And I was certainly receiving some information that was not in the other “sources” that I had examined.

There were brief hand-written one-page letters, with but one recollection/image (of Louis as a boy in Utiku, Louis the rugby player in Dunedin, Dr Potaka as a puller-of-teeth in Murchison and in Takaka, Dr Potaka as a caring surgeon in Takaka...). And there were letters that were three or four typed pages in length with anecdotes (from Cecil Wills the long tale of Dr Potaka doctoring in the back country of Murchison, from Takaka-born Professor Emeritus of Geography Jim Rose of Sydney a lengthy discussion of pioneer days and troubled days in Takaka in the mid-1930s...). Some letters included enclosures – copies of photographs of Louis, and colour photos of his gravestone in Rototai Cemetery in Golden Bay (generously sent by Mr Bert Holmwood who had helped “build his gravestone”) and one of a panorama around Murchison (from Mr Bert Spiers). Some letters simply recalled the sadness in their families when Dr Potaka died. More than half the responses ventured to tell me what they could remember about – or remembered being told about – the circumstances of his death, in October, 1936. (In his first letter, Dr Murray Farrant warned me that his knowledge of Potaka was only “hearsay”).

Of course, there was some repetition, and the law of diminishing returns set in after the first twenty or so responses; but there was not a letter or message that did not tell me something that was new to me – he played the violin; he organised ballroom dancing; his brother Albert had been killed in a car crash in 1958; he presented a paper on varicose veins to the “Medicine Men” in Nelson in 1929; he had tried to call his mother on the day of his death but she had the telephone off the hook because she was “frequently pestered” by a neighbour lady; Esther took his golf clubs back to the North Island after his funeral... Or that suggested another factor, another possibility to be thought about – his health; his love of animals, especially big dogs; his interest in archaeology...). As I wrote back to Cecil Wills, “Every response I receive offers something ‘unique’ – and sometimes hints that are tantalising, and often astonishing!” I could have added that some information received was puzzling – “I remember Louis as rather tall”; “Louis was rather excitable and eccentric”. And that some was faulty - “He died in the Antarctic”. “He was traveling to Nelson on October 2, 1936, when he asked the driver of the bus to stop...”.

Two especially exciting responses to my early general enquiry in the media came from Kirsty Woods and Patricia Kennedy, granddaughters, respectively, of Louis' sisters Nukuteaio Selina and Wera Rawinia, and thus great nieces of Louis Potaka. The message on the monitor on November 8, 1996, told me that Kirsty had "just seen a notice in the Maori news summary that you are seeking information about Louis Potaka who was my great uncle. I know of him as Uncle 'Ike'. My mother is Mina McKenzie ...we have a lot of information about Uncle 'Ike'...my mother helped one of my cousins who has just completed a research project on Uncle Ike as part of a university course". And the message from Patricia, a few weeks later, told me that her father, James R. Edwards of Wanganui, was Dr Potaka's nephew and that he had told her he would be writing to me shortly.

Meanwhile, I had learned the important basic details about Louis Potaka and his immediate family; and they had come to me as a result of "surfing the net" back on September 15, 1996 (shortly before my media probes). A search engine suddenly produced a "Potaka" contact, and I immediately sent a message to Australia: "Is it possible that you are related to the Potakas of the Nelson-Taraka area of South Island, New Zealand? And that you know of Dr Louis Potaka who died in October, 1936? I am a biographer interested in Dr P. All the best". Reading my message now, I see that I not only misspelled Takaka but also wrongly assumed that the Potakas were in that South Island area.

In any event, Darrin Potaka of Crows Nest, Sydney, responded to my fishing expedition. in cyberspace. "Hello! Sorry I don't know of the Doctor, but would like to know more". The message continued with "My lineage is centred almost entirely within the Rangitiki River area. My immediate extended past family all came from a triangle roughly within Taihape, Wanganui, Palmerston North area". A second message from Darrin, on September 25, 1996, reported that his family in New Zealand were putting together some family information for me. And, of course, I eagerly awaited it.

And on October 1, Darrin's mother in Tauranga entered the picture with an e-mail message. Mrs Lois Potaka explained that "my husband Jack is a second cousin to Louis, he was born in 1935; we both went to Utiku Primary...will send things on as I get them". And in due course two "Family Group Records" arrived in Waterloo. And I have no reason to doubt their accuracy. One was for "Arapeta Potaka and Esther Potaka" (and at the top of the list of their children was Louis Hauti Potaka, born March 14, 1901, in Rata; unmarried; died October 2, 1936). The second record was for "Eli Caselberg and Catherine Cohen" (and their middle daughter is Esther Caselberg, born 1882; in Aberdare, Wales; died in Palmerston North in April, 1962).

To return to the responses to my general survey – some prompted me to do some reading, and they all provoked specific questions from me.

Professor Rose propelled me toward a history book - to seek some understanding of the politics in New Zealand in the 1930s; and, indeed, I found that there was a change in national government in December, 1935 when the Labour Party won the election. And

letters from Mrs McConachie and Miss Alice Wells and others persuaded me that I should try to get a better feeling for how remote Utiku and Takaka and Murchison were sixty years and more ago. And I found in the two relevant volumes of the *Natural Resources Survey* (published by the New Zealand Government Printer) good photographs and descriptions that put me right about the economy of the Utiku area in the 1930s and the physical terrain of the Takaka (Golden Bay) region. And the map library at York University (Toronto) has all the 1: 50,000 topographic sheets of New Zealand; so that I could appreciate where Stoke and Richmond were! And Murchison and the Matakītaki River; Moteuka and Takaka, and Takaka Hill...and the Canaan Road; Rata and Hunterville...and even Potaka Mountain and Potaka Road (west of Mangaweka).

In my replies to a handful of the letters and messages received I was able to gently correct some dates (the dates of BAE2, for instance) or wrong impressions (that Dr Potaka “had died alone”). And with most replies I enclosed copies of a photograph of Louis that had been sent to me from the Golden Bay Museum - and in several cases I ventured to probe a little more specifically! To Miss Wells, for instance, who had actually known Louis and who had mentioned her own date of birth, I offered my congratulations on reaching 90 (in 1996) and ventured to ask whether Potaka had talked about Murchison, or his family, or his time in the Antarctic (I was probing, gently, for a comment on the ultraviolet keratitis he suffered in January, 1953, and perhaps on any vision problems he might have had). In her second letter to me, she enclosed a photograph of herself in the 1930s “so that you will be able to see what we were like when we knew Louis”. Nothing about corneal damage. (Probably the oldest of my New Zealand informants was Bert Spiers MBE; he was in his 94<sup>th</sup> year when he died in September, 1998).

Though I generally refrained from “putting words in their mouths” when replying to them, I think my informants understood that I sought “explanatory” and “contextual” information as much as factual detail. I asked questions such as: Was the youthful Louis popular at school? Were the Potakas living along the main highway north of Utiku well off? Why did Louis choose the medical profession? Was it exceptional for Louis to go to medical school? Was Louis popular and happy at Otago Medical School? Was Louis close to his mother, Esther? Why did Louis apply for a position in Samoa? Was Dr Potaka a different person after his experience in the Antarctic? (Again, this was an indirect probe primarily to ascertain whether Louis might not be able to see as well as he had; even whether he was changed psychologically from continued use of anesthetizing drops to lessen the pain in his eyes. But no information about either was forthcoming).

Several of my informants then wrote a second time (and some, like Bert Spiers, wrote several times), with additional thoughts and pertinent comments – and suggestions. It was suggested, for instance, that I place a letter in the *Manawatu Standard* and the *Wanganui Chronicle* - my subsequent attempts to do so did not succeed – and one writer to whom I must have sounded very uninformed suggested that I should try and find a copy of the *National Geographic* for October, 1935 “which has Potaka’s picture in”. I might add that nobody suggested I should mind my own business, although one writer noted that an old-timer he had quizzed on my behalf had exclaimed “Who the hell is Bruce Young



anyway?” A most valuable suggestion, from several respondents, to my further probing, was “Why don’t you write to...?” And as a consequence, after a number of false starts, in late 1997 and in 1998 I had half a dozen most informative exchanges. But to return to the Kirsty Woods-Patricia Kennedy-Lois Potaka contacts.

Patricia Kennedy sent excellent copies of two photographs taken in Rata (noted in my Appendix 2). That of the family around the casket of Arepeta (Albert) Potaka is especially touching, and one sees the grief and pain in Louis’ face. And Patricia’s father’s five-page fax to me in January, 1997, was really most illuminating, dealing, in part, as it did with Esther (Louis’ mother) and life in Wanganui and on the farm so long ago.

Kirsty Wood’s first message led me to Neville Lomax (her cousin); and Neville generously sent me a copy of his essay on Potaka, with photographs that I had not seen before (also noted in Appendix 2). While his essay focused mainly on events in the Antarctic described in DISCOVERY (1935), Neville provided, in two long e-mail messages, some critical information on family matters as well as some guidance on Maori traditions and culture.

And when Lois Potaka provided the fax number of Kirsty’s mother in Palmerston North, I did not delay sending Mrs Mina McKenzie (Neville’s main source of family information) a fax with a page of questions, specific and general – although I understood that she and her husband, Bruce, were busy with a new bookstore business they had opened in Palmerston North.

I had also, about that time, been trying to clarify a lead that had come via Cyd Daughtrey – one of my most persistent and helpful “volunteers” in New Zealand – that promised major treasures. The word was that the regional museum in Wanganui had Potaka’s “Antarctic Papers”. Eventually, my fax of February 10, 1997, reached the Curator, asking whether there were “letters and diaries?...can copies be made?...do you have an inventory of same?” and stating that “This is a great surprise, since I have not been successful in Nelson, Wellington, etc”. I meant, I suppose, that I had thought museums and archives elsewhere in the system would have known where the “Potaka Papers” were held. At any rate, Ms Libby Sharp’s response (by fax on March, 1997) burst the bubble: the museum had only two letters written by Louis Potaka, and they were written from Otago University, and she would send them to Mrs Mina McKenzie, as a senior family member, to deal with.

Sadly, on March 11, 1997, messages from Lois Potaka (by e-mail) and Jim Edwards (by fax) told me that Mrs McKenzie had died suddenly. And Neville Lomax’s message on March 15 noted that he had arranged to talk to her the very next day about Louis on my behalf.

Although I had mailed copies of a first draft of part of this *Introduction* to my many contacts in New Zealand – and had received a number of comments along the lines of “How interesting! Now we are looking forward to the real thing!” – I essentially suspended my enquiries and writing for some months after April, 1997, and indeed the

hiatus lasted into 1998. From Dunedin I received a copy of Ian Church's fascinating *Last Port to Antarctica* (1997) - and I mused about finding and reading Jean Sutton's *How Richmond Grew*, and *Difficult Country* and *Down From the Mountain* (books that New Zealanders had brought to my attention).

In 1998 my Louis Potaka biographical project picked up steam, both the gathering of information and the composition of the essay.

In January a letter from "a keen local historian" (who had not been born until 1938) offered some hearsay evidence concerning Takaka in the early thirties, while in February two long and detailed letters provided first-hand information about the dispute in Takaka at that time and the persons involved on both sides – as well as about the experience of being operated on by Dr Potaka! In June, at the Maryland archives, we viewed Byrd's motion picture about BAE2 (NWDNM 200.382) as well as the "Unedited footage" (200.76). And then in July there was a surprise.

I had written a letter of enquiry to Tapley Swift Ltd in Dunedin (H.L.Tapley & Co Ltd having been Byrd's "agents" in the 1930s) in 1996, and their response of October 22, 1996, reminding me of the passage of time, had not surprised me:

The Byrd Expeditions were certainly a colourful diversion in the history of H.L.Tapley & Co Ltd. Unfortunately no archival material come to us as their later successor and the last of their staff who would have some recollection died some years ago. Our one older ex-staff member who has looked into the subject recalls no material relating to Dr Potaka apart from what appeared in Byrd's book *DISCOVERY* in 1935.

But I was surprised in July, 1998, to receive Dunedin historian Ian Farquhar's letter and the enclosures. Aware of my earlier letter to Tapley Swift, he was sending copies of some letters that had turned up in a file of messages that the captain of the *Bear of Oakland* had transmitted down South to BAE2 members during 1934. (And readers who received the first draft of my Section 4 distributed in May, 1998, may notice the incorporation of some new material). Ian also commented on some draft pages about the steamer *Coptic* in a letter of August 12, 1998, and advised me that no Caselbergs were listed amongst the passengers for the January, June and October arrivals of the *Coptic* in New Zealand in 1887. And he included useful entries from the *CYCLOPEDIA OF NEW ZEALAND* Vol 1 (1897) on Eli and Myer Caselberg (Esther's father and uncle).

Mr John Caselberg of Dunedin (to whom I had first written in 1988, and who replied, after returning home from Australia, in mid-1996) had also provided information about Myer Caselberg (his grandfather). He also generously enclosed copies of letters he had gathered in his enquiries about Louis Potaka (including a 1984 letter from Bert Spiers, and a 1985 letter from Mr Jim Caffin, whom we had interviewed in Christchurch in 1988; as well as a brief one in Potaka's own handwriting to a Murchison friend).

Another pleasant surprise was a response to a letter editor Margaret Bradshaw had published for me in ANTARCTIC (The Journal of the New Zealand Antarctic Society, Vol.15, No 4, 1998). “Do You Know This Man?” was the headline used above my letter, which described my search for any “letters, papers or recollections” concerning Potaka; and it caught the eye of at least one reader (and perhaps only one!). And Antarctic post historian Ian Cameron of Auckland responded with a copy of Louis’ letter to Miss Williams (included in Section 4), and with two franked 3 cent BAE2 stamps!

An even greater surprise in April, 1998, was making contact with a member of the Bydder family, with, indeed, Dr E.C. (Ed) Bydder’s eldest son, Dr P.V. (Perce) Bydder. As a child, Perce wrote, he had “heard quite a lot about Dr Potaka...and of the personality clashes, local politics, national politics in New Zealand, and the NZ Branch of the British Medical Association’s stance on a number of things, with the situation seeming, to me in reflection, to tie a lot of them up”. Perce kindly enclosed with his four-page letter a photocopy of a portion of a chapter from Rex Wright St.Clair’s *A History of the New Zealand Medical Association – The First Hundred Years* for my edification – and my first glimpse of the redoubtable Dr Jamieson. And then in August he generously commented at length on the first full draft of this essay. It’s true to say, I think, that the ideas and information transmitted to me by Professor Jim Rose (who in fact turned up at my house in Canada one day in 1997) and Dr Perce Bydder have strongly influenced portions of the later sections of this essay. (Happily, as I note later, some documentary evidence was to come to light, in 2005, to further boost Sections 5 and 6).

Dr Perce Bydder suggested in April, 1998, that Mrs Bernice Baird “would remember the Potaka days”, and she was kind enough to reply at some length to my enquiry sent in June, 1998. She wrote in July that she had, however, not arrived in Takaka until 1938, when she had married Ken Baird, a good friend of Dr Ed Bydder. And what she knew about Potaka was “only what I was told by my late husband...who liked Potaka...and so did Dr Ed”. He had evidently told her a great deal (including details of “what some called the ‘Doctors’ War”, in Takaka), though nothing about Potaka’s earlier Murchison days.

A significant breakthrough in clarifying the nature of Dr Potaka’s troubles in Murchison in 1930 appeared to be at hand – or in hand – when a package of copies of selected hand-written extracts from the minutes of the Murchison County Council (MCC) meetings over the years 1929-1934 arrived in Waterloo in August, 1998. They tied in with a “summary” of the minutes of the old Nelson Hospital Board that the Nelson-Marlborough Health Services (NMHS) had prepared for their own purposes, and which the NMHS had kindly sent me in 1996. And I had no reason to doubt their authenticity (though I cannot vouch for the accuracy of the minute-taker at those meetings!) And the extracts received certainly called for substantial revision of the first pages of Section 3 of my draft essay (as those who compare the draft and the 1999 or 2005 versions will immediately appreciate). However, the new and additional material lead to more questions; and we have yet to learn what was in Potaka’s letters to MCC Chairman Stewart (as I note in Question 17 in Appendix 3 Unanswered Questions).

Section 3 was further amended in 1998 after I received a transcript of librarian Janne Falkner's interview with Thomas Monahan – the anecdote about Potaka and the snowball came from Mr Monahan.

An anecdote that I have omitted from the main essay appeared in Professor Mason Durie's book *Whaiora: Maori Health Development*, (1994). Potaka was said to have removed his own appendix (p.51). In August, 1998, Professor Durie told me the anecdote had come from a "colleague, Dr Henry Bennett, now the oldest living Maori doctor". But my attempt to reach Dr Bennett in Rotorua was unsuccessful (and the eminent psychiatrist died in 2000).

And it was when I heard from Te Runanga o Ngati Hauiti Executive Officer Utiku K.Potaka of Rata in July, 1998, that I began revising the early pages of Section 2 of this essay. Utiku Potaka send me not only copies of the rolls printed for the Utiku School Centennial Reunion in 1997 but also a copy of his own presentation concerning the Iwi and whanau and Ngati Hauiti in the Taihape Town Hall on November 8, 1997. And hopefully I have correctly synthesized the information from Neville Lomax, John Caselberg, Utiku Potaka and Ian Farquhar and the 1897 CYCLOPEDIA in those pages.

A significant addition in the 2005 revision of this essay is the discussion of the Native Medical Officer (NMO) in Takaka, in Sections 6 and 7. The NMO issue is mentioned in independent historian Dr Derek A. Dow's book entitled *Maori Health and Government Policy 1840-1940* (1999); and Dr Dow of Auckland drew my attention, in July 2001, to a paragraph in his book which he based on an examination of the correspondence of the Director-General of Health in the National Archives in Wellington. Our correspondence had started when Dr Dow "stumbled across" the reference to my planned essay on Potaka in the October, 1996, issue of *Ngō Korero* while he was researching for a second volume on government policy and Maori health covering the period 1940 -2000, in which he intends to incorporate an analysis of Maori doctors, "including those who qualified prior to 1940".

According to Dr Dow, Louis Potaka was the fifth Maori medical graduate (excluding Richard Grace, who qualified in 1922 in Edinburgh and practiced in the UK). Louis followed Maui Pomare (who graduated in 1899, in the USA), Peter Buck/Te Rangi Hiroa (1904, who graduated at Otago), Tutere Wi Repa (1908, Otago) and Ned Ellison (1919, Otago); with Golan Maaka/Te Korara graduating at Otago in 1937, the year after Louis' death. Other than Grace, all these doctors are noted in the *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, together with "nearly 500" other Maoris; but not Dr Louis Potaka. (The legendary Dr J.P.S Jamieson is, of course, in the *Dictionary*, as is Louis' great-uncle Myer Caselberg, who lived till he was 81 years of age).

The notion of revising the December 31, 1999, essay (which had been gathering dust in Waterloo) and incorporating what I had learned since 1999 (and correcting some slips) was actually triggered by a message from Utiku Potaka in April, 2004. He had in August, 1999, raised the possibility of producing the essay (then in draft form) as a "booklet". Now, he was telling me that his Tribal Authority was establishing an annual tribal

journal, and that one of its themes would be “History and Traditions” and that they might like to include a biography of Dr Potaka in the first issue They might even consider publishing my essay as a special edition. I sent a paper copy of the full December 31, 1999, version of the essay, and indicated that I would be making some necessary revisions – and offered a number of suggestions as to how it might be used by them, including the possibility that I might compose a shorter version for their publication. I was told several persons would examine the essay...but I had no further communication on the possibilities...and I proceeded with the process of revision.

As I was proceeding with the revision process, in 2004, I heard from the Golden Bay Museum that they would be including some material on Louis in a forthcoming exhibition about health services in their region, and I sent Mrs Baird my recently-prepared “Contents” page, together with the answers to a few specific questions.

Shortly thereafter, on August 19, 2004, I received another message from Takaka - from Ms Jane McDonald telling me that she had “been researching the history of the hospital owned by Dr Bydder in the 1930s and the inevitable conflagration between Dr Louis Potaka and Sister Hyland/Dr Bydder”. She had seen some notes on my research in the Golden Bay Museum and believed I would welcome what she had found out about Sister Hyland. This message led to several very interesting exchanges about the 1935-36 period in Takaka, and to her providing some information about Sister Lynda Hyland, primarily gleaned from that lady’s living relatives.

Jane disputes Louis Potaka’s claim, in his 1936 letter to Byrd, that Sister Hyland was a “dreadful person” (and I would respond that we do not know in detail why Potaka was moved to so describe her – but for sure he was referring only to his association with her during the time he was Bydder’s locum tenens; and in any event, the fact is - that is how he perceived her, and was thus affected by her); and Jane provides information as to what prompted Bydder to return prematurely from Scotland and to terminate his locum tenens arrangement with Louis. Her messages shed some light on Question # 25 in my Appendix 3; and my narrative is certainly strengthened by my incorporation in the appropriate places of some of the points raised in Jane McDonald’s messages, including a comment or two she found in the Nelson Hospital Board’s minutes of 1936. Readers of earlier drafts of the essay may note that “(and she with him)” in the third line of the second paragraph on the first page of Section 7 is a post-1999 insertion; and I may say that Jane McDonald accepts that when I say, or I imagine David Mason saying or thinking (in the line above) that Lynda Hyland is “demanding”, it is intended as a statement about, and compliment to, her professionalism, rather than an undeserved criticism. While, regrettably, we have virtually no documented information/evidence that would answer the second part of Question 25 about Potaka and Hyland, and nothing that clarifies Potaka’s claim – or the outcome of that claim - that Bydder owed him money when he was terminated (Question 36), we have had, since mid-2005, very reliable (I would venture to say) written information about certain aspects of the Bydder-Potaka relationship and dispute of 1935-1936. But first we note a further pleasant contribution from District Health Board Property Manager John Williams.

John Williams (of Nelson) in early 2005 produced two items that deserve inclusion in the revised version of December, 2005. One was the group photograph with Louis Potaka in the front row that I note in Appendix 3 (but we are not certain of its date: the best guess seems to be that it was taken when Potaka was doing his “residency” in Nelson, and soon after the opening of the new Nelson Hospital). The other item will interest both past and present patients at the Nelson Hospital, and also persons interested in horticulture: the fruit of the grapefruit tree that Louis planted, Williams reports, was used to “make grapefruit marmalade in the hospital kitchen for patients’ breakfasts” for thirty years or more; then, while the tree was removed during the recent hospital redevelopment, three cuttings had been taken from it, and “we now have three young grapefruit trees...planted in the Pediatric Inpatient/Outpatient garden”.

And now this introductory section concludes with a note on information that came to light most recently - in mid-2005 during the final stages of this 2005 revision (as I mentioned in the Preface). Once again, it was casually searching the web that led, eventually, to some answers to one or two of the “unanswered questions”.

A Google search revealed that there was a “Maori Medical Practitioners Association” (TEORA). And a message on its “Discussion Board” on its webpage (*teora.maori.nz*), posted more than two years earlier (on May 5, 2003) read: “Does anybody know more about Dr Louis Potaka than what is in Mason Durie’s book?” My response, sent on 25 July, 2004, for the “Discussion Board”, said simply: “I am currently revising my 1999 essay on the life of Dr Louis Potaka”. But, time passed; and it seemed to have fallen on deaf ears.

However, almost a year later, I was contacted by a Nelson doctor; and I transmitted my essay to him (which I was very close to finalising). In due course, in July, 2005, I received material that I had not seen, and, indeed, had not expected to see: copies of 19 pages of handwritten minutes of several 1936 meetings of the Nelson Division of the BMA (NZ Branch). Held between May, 1936, and early October, 1936, the meetings concerned, in part, the “dispute” between Dr Ed Bydder and Dr Louis Potaka. “Unfortunately”, commented my informant in his covering letter, “the records that I hold do not include the written submissions of those involved in the affairs...”. Unfortunate indeed – and neither do they reveal what was in certain letters mentioned in the minutes. Nevertheless, as the reader of Section 6, in particular, may detect, there was much in those minutes to strengthen my essay (in total about three pages worth!).

And enough to make me feel pretty sure (80% sure) that I could say with some certainty what was in the papers that the Louis Potaka I had been contemplating for so long had burned on Takaka Hill on October 2, 1936 - and to prompt me to revise what may have been in Louis’ mind that day (which I do, at the end of Section 8), a mind in great turmoil.

Finally, I should mention my reconsideration in late November, 2005, of the ultraviolet keratitis (snowblindness) that Louis experienced while at Little America. By all accounts many of the explorers were afflicted (when they neglected to wear their

protective glasses) – but Potaka’s had not healed after at least 18 days. I had long neglected this fact – as well as the condition of Potaka’s eyes as described by Bob Young in the entry in his narrative for January 24, 1935. And I had taken Potaka at his word when he wrote Byrd, in 1936, saying that his “sight was not affected”, his eye problem was just “annoying”. And thus I had, in my assessment of events and in the earlier versions of this essay, not adequately dealt with the impact of Louis using cocaine drops for pain control and, by his own admission, excessively so (though inadvertently), for a short period. Unfortunately we do not have the data/records that a medical eye doctor would deem necessary to be absolutely certain...but recent enquiries led me to believe that Louis was exactly right when he remarked (according to my uncle, Bob Young) that he thought that using cocaine he had damaged his eyes - the corneas of which were severely inflamed because he had not worn his sunglasses (which is a normal consequence of not wearing protective glasses), but which had not healed spontaneously within 48 hours (and the persistence of snowblindness beyond 48 hours is considered abnormal, for otherwise healthy corneas).

If I am pretty sure now, in December 2005, about the contents of the notes Louis burned on October 2, 1936, I am pretty well persuaded (80 % persuaded) that his vision – or lack of vision – had weighed on his mind from early January, 1935, till the day of his untimely demise. And weighed heavily and persistently. And probably had diminished his ability to work at a sustained and intense level...My essay now reflects this view, and speculates briefly about how he may have handled his condition. It stops short of suggesting that others must have known the facts from February 1935 onwards - though it is hard to believe that two or three persons did not know, or at least suspect some significant visual impairment. If some did, they seem to have refrained from mentioning it during his lifetime, and to have honoured Louis’s memory by keeping silent.

## ***2: Family and Early Years***

After several weeks at sea, the three young Welsh-born girls felt a little unsteady when they took their first steps on New Zealand soil. Six, five and three years of age respectively, Leah, Esther and Selina were disembarking from the 4,367 ton White Star Line steamer *Coptic* with their parents Eli and Catherine Caselberg (*nee* Cohen), and they were soon to meet their Uncle Myer and their several Caselberg cousins.

Polish-born Uncle Myer, sixteen years older than his thirty-year old Bristol-born brother Eli, had already been in New Zealand for twenty-four years (having arrived in 1863, from the UK, where the family name had been changed from “Kasreal”). He had prospered in business at various locations and in 1874 had moved the headquarters of Caselberg and Co to Masterton, where he had been Mayor for three successive terms (and where in 1892 he would found the Wairarapa Farmers’ Cooperative Association). Now, in 1887, Myer was welcoming his brother and Glasgow-born sister-in-law and their three girls to New Zealand, having assisted Eli and his family to migrate from Aberdare in the county of Glamorgan in Wales. And doubtless the conversation soon turned to business and the prospects for Eli who had learned the clothing trade in Wales.

And Eli was soon persuaded that he too should become a merchant, a storekeeper; and should open up in a small community in the back country. And before long, with the help of Myer, and using a tent as a store, Eli was in Mangaweka on the Rangitikei River, some miles south of Utiku. The site of the settlement was “all standing bush and the only means of communication was by a back-track to Hunterville”, but “trade developed considerably” and Eli was soon joined by a Mr Stephens and Caselberg & Stephens’ opened a commodious store in the village (speedily rebuilding after the first structure was “demolished by fire”). Perhaps his wife Catherine helped Eli in the store, which included the Post Office. Perhaps their daughters mingled with the customers.

Born on November 24, 1882, Esther had been named for her maternal grandmother Esther Cohen (*nee* Jacobs), and like her two sisters Esther had some Polish blood in her veins – her paternal grandfather having been born in Poland in 1814, one year before the final downfall of Napoleon. All three girls would marry and spend the rest of their lives in New Zealand. Esther would live into her eightieth year, outliving Selina by six years but predeceasing her younger sister Leah by six years. At her death in April, 1962, Esther had been widowed for over four decades; and it had been some 25 years since she had buried her eldest child, a son, in October, 1936.

Another child who was five years old in 1887 when the *Coptic* docked was Arapeta (Albert) Tapui Potaka. Born on March 21, 1882 – and thus eight months older than Esther Caselberg – Albert was the second son and third child of Utiku Potaka and his fourth spouse Rora Te Oiroa (*nee* Goff, and recorded on The Family Group record as ‘half French’). Utiku had been born before the arrival of the Europeans in the area that the Ngati Hauiti had influence over “in a world steeped in Maori tradition and history”, and he was the last of the old time rangatira (chief) of the Ngati Hauiti. He had fought in the Maori Land Courts to protect the interests of the Ngati Hauiti in the area extending



from north of Taihape in the north to the top of the Ruahine Range in the east, south to Rata and west to the Turakina River. And one of the reserves eventually set aside for Maori occupation was an area of 2,100 acres that was allocated to Utiku Potaka and Rora Te Oiroa and four of their children. “Centred on the Kaikoura stream, it was initially named the Potaka Native Township but it was later renamed after Utiku himself”; and a number of sections in the township were gifted by the family for community purposes, such as a pound, recreation reserve, post office and the Utiku School (started in 1897, when Albert, born in Rata by the Rangitikei River, was fifteen years old).

Albert’s father, Ngati Hauti Tribal Chief Utiku Potaka, raised not only his own children but also those of his younger brother Ramiha, following Ramiha’s death, including the teenager Rakapa. Albert’s first cousin (or sister), Rakapa subsequently, in 1884, married Te One Wiwi Taiaroa, son of the Hon. Hori Kerei Taiaroa, member of the House of Representatives for the Southern Maori Districts and high ranking Ariki (principal chief) of the South Island Ngai Tahu tribe of Otakua on the Otago Peninsula.

When did the paths of Esther Caselberg and Albert Potaka first cross? Probably not when they were both still five-year olds. But perhaps not long after, when Utiku and Rora were in Eli’s trading store, perhaps at the Post Office counter. Or when Eli was buying farm produce from the Chief - or discussing the price of land in the district. Or might it have been several years later – at a social gathering perhaps - in one of the several places up and down the Rangitikei Valle (Rata, Hunterville, Mangaweka, Utiku)? Or at school? In the years ahead, would Esther (‘Mum’ or ‘Aunt Et’) not have recalled those early days for her children and grandchildren and the other youngsters she cared for? If so, her stories have not come to light. Indeed, I can only speculate about Esther’s childhood and her upbringing and schooling: presumably she was raised in the Jewish faith; possibly she was educated with her two sisters in their home; probably she helped her father in the family store. And perhaps the teenager Albert Potaka enjoyed chatting to the young Esther Caselberg in Caselberg and Stephens’ Mangaweka store. Perhaps he invited her to see haka and encouraged her to taste poi, and he told her about his iwi, and they talked about Maoritanga - and perhaps he helped her with te reo Maori. What did Eli and Catherine hope their three girls would do with their lives? Did they envisage Esther marrying and settling down in the district, or going off to Palmerston North, Wanganui or even Wellington? Did Esther have aspirations beyond Mangaweka?

Albert Potaka and Esther were married in Wanganui on October 2, 1900. He was 18 and a half years old, she not quite eighteen. Arepeta, I’m told, was a handsome chap; and the photo of Esther taken twenty years later indicates that she had character; and they doubtless made a striking young couple in 1900. Unfortunately we have neither photographs nor accounts of the wedding of the young Jewish girl and the young Maori man, son of a tribal chief. And although Maori men seldom married pakeha women in those days, we have no evidence that the alliance caused any waves in either the Caselberg or Potaka family circles. And their future was assured, Albert, it is said, having taken up farming the 300 acres at Utiku in the Awarua block allocated to him.

And neither do we have evidence that the arrival of Albert and Esther’s first child on

March 14, 1901, was not a moment of great joy for all, especially the two sets of grandparents. What were the thoughts of the adults who may have gathered to celebrate the birth of Louis Hauiti Potaka? Did some voice high expectations for the young couple's first born son? Would some have envisaged an education for him beyond what most had known? Somebody might have noted that he had the new twentieth century ahead of him in which to make his mark. And it would have been understood that come what may encouragement and support for Louis to do so would not be lacking. And the baby had at least one young Caselberg cousin - old Myer Caselberg's grandson Lionel having been born a few years earlier (in 1895); and oddly enough, after service at Gallipoli in World War 1 he was to take his medical degree at Otago University.

Louis was too young, of course, to be involved in the Great War - and it's not likely that the young fellow knew much about what was happening on the world scene in the unsettled years before its commencement in 1914. His life centred on family and school and the outdoors. Siblings were born fairly regularly, and by the time he was five, Louis had three sisters. And we have a delightful photograph of the four of them taken in the orchard on the farm at Utiku, Louis looking more lively and 'grown up' than Catherine, Selina and Rawinia, and obviously not overwhelmed by the responsibilities of being the eldest! Another sister followed (Utanga/Ada); and then Esther and Albert had two more sons - Wilson/Wirihana and Utiku Albert ("Uti", the potiki of the family, named after his father and paternal grandfather). All the siblings were born in Utiku, with the exception of Utiku Albert, who was born in Wanganui in 1915. If there was sibling rivalry with the girls, Louis was too mature to be other than protective of his brothers when they came along. In fact, Louis was already a schoolboy.

The rolls of Utiku Public School (printed for the Utiku School Centennial Reunion in 1997) list Hauiti Potaka for 1907 - 1908 (as well as his sister Rora Kathleen; and sisters Nukuteaio Serlina, Wera Rawinia and Utanga Ripeka in 1909, 1911 and 1913 respectively); and one wonders whether Louis or one of his sisters is in the photograph of some fifty or more children in front of the old Utiku Public School building. And whether there would there have been records in that building of Louis' progress through school. In any event, two letters written in 1996 by the same lady tell of the school and Utiku in those days:

"I lived in the village Dr Potaka was brought up in and went to the same primary school, Utiku, which I believe was named after his ancestors, probably his grandfather, Utiku Potaka. His father, Albert Potaka, was a full-blooded Maori and his mother Jewish.

Ike Potaka, as he was known in those days, was probably finishing at primary school as I was starting. I don't think I ever spoke to him: he was a young man of thirteen and I a scrappy kid of five - he probably didn't know I existed. I think he went from there to...He was considered a brilliant scholar and well thought of. I remember him as a rather tall lad with Jewish features and dark eyes. I went to school with his sisters... and later trained as a nurse with Selina...

There was no anti -Maori feeling in Utiku, but we did not mix much socially. At school we were just kids together. On the whole the Maoris were academically bright. The Maori families (Albert Potakas, Pike Potakas, Winiatas and Gilchrists – I think Mrs Gilchrist was Albert’s sister) all lived on farms along the main highway – about a mile north of Utiku. They had nice big houses and I guess they were affluent. I don’t think any Maoris lived in the village . As far as I know they were respected and liked...We always knew Ike’s father as Albert Potaka... in those days the Europeans didn’t bother to pronounce the Maori names of people and places or altered them...I have heard that in some schools children were forbidden to use the Maori language – not so at Utiku...

Utiku was a timber–mill township...already past its heyday. There were empty shops as the timber was cutting out. My father was a builder and was employed on the construction of a new freezing works; so farming was already taking over... I don’t think we felt isolated. Utiku is on the Main Trunk Railway line and there was a railway station there and all but the express trains stopped there. The train was the main form of transport – otherwise a horse and a gig. The first car I saw was in 1914 (great excitement!). There were no telephones except at the Post Office...The War: watching trains pass through on the way to embarkation full of laughing excited men waving and shouting...quite a few of the lads we knew; and next thing the casualty lists...the Somme and Gallipoli ...”

From a family member we learn of the young Louis’ outdoor life:

“My great-grandmother - Ike’s Aunt Ada – told me that Ike spent a lot of his early days, when not at school, on their farm at Utiku . I suspect that Ike’s love of rod-fishing may have come from his Uncle Wilson who was renowned in the district as an expert trout fly fisherman. My great-grandfather was always keen to take whoever would accompany him on his many fishing expeditions... “

And it’s not hard to imagine that life was a lot of fun for Louis Potaka in those Utiku days. Bright enough to more than hold his own in the classroom, and agile and sturdy enough to join in the games in the schoolyard and to enjoy the outdoors, we have no reason to suppose that Louis was bullied or was a ‘loner’. And he had sisters enough to know how to respond to the girls who may have been inclined to tease him - because he was on the small side. At the same time, one would not be surprised if one were to learn that his parents, and Esther in particular, pressured him to do well at school, to be an achiever. And it’s not likely that Uncle Wilson risked Esther’s ire by encouraging the lad to skip school and go fishing. But we don’t know - and we don’t know if and when he was taken down to Wanganui to see the trading vessels on the wide river, what books he read, and what he thought about, and in whom he may have confided.

Did he suspect that his father was not well before his parents confided in him? Was there persistent coughing and tiredness, and perhaps jobs on the farm that were left undone, to alert Louis, and to cast the first cloud over his life? When did the doctor first come to the house, or Esther first take Albert to the doctor? And was Louis part of the decision-making process when the family decided to move into Wanganui?

Wanganui was where the medical services needed were; and the house that they found in the town had all the attributes that the doctors said were good for Arepeta: high foundations, high ceilings, numerous windows, French windows in the main bedroom and excellent ventilation throughout. Afflicted with tuberculosis, Arepeta could rest and recover in an environment not unlike that in the sanatoria of those days. And Esther could watch over him and perhaps lead her family of seven children in a prayer for their father's return to full health. And Louis was enrolled in a local high school.

Whether Louis Potaka would have entered Wanganui Collegiate whether or not the family had relocated from Utiku is not clear. What is almost certain is that his years at Collegiate, from 1915 –1919, were immensely significant. He was moulded - in the classroom, in the library, on the rugby field, in his cadet troop, on the stage – into a spirited young man able and eager to grasp and overcome all scholastic and sporting opportunities and challenges, and ready to take on a leadership role. A corporal in the cadets at about sixteen years of age (and a rather solemn-looking one in the photograph we have), in his senior year Louis became a Prefect. Unfortunately we have no details about his school career. In which subjects, we wonder, did Louis excel? And which did he find boring? Which of his schoolmasters stirred his imagination, and which did he deem to be lightweights – employed perhaps because the best were away fighting and dying for King and Country? And what schoolmasterly predictions were penned on his reports? Perhaps: “A bright lad. Curious about everything. He should go far”. Or: “An intelligent youngster. Needs to learn to control his temper, or he'll run into trouble”. We know that Louis had what few Maori had – but what was being recognised by some Maori leaders as very important: access to Western-education; and doubtless Esther and Arepeta drove Louis to do his best, perhaps even to be the best. Especially in the circumstances.

And the awful fact that they all had to face, about mid-way through Louis' time at Collegiate, was that Arepeta's tuberculosis was terminal. He would, and sooner rather than later, fall victim to what had been for half a century or more the “curse of the Maori race”. And Louis would then be the ‘man of the house’. How the prognostication was conveyed to the several children we don't know – perhaps the younger boys (Wilson and Utiku) never realised their father was slipping away from them. Esther would have told her four daughters, no doubt; but one can imagine that sixteen-year old Louis would have wanted to know directly from the doctors what had caused the disease and why it could not be cured. Following the doctor out to his car (or carriage), Louis may have pleaded: “But, Sir, isn't there something that could be tried? Should we arrange to take Father to see the doctors in Wellington?” Perhaps he posed the same questions to a teacher at school. A wrenching time for Louis for sure (who surely revered his father), and one when, the family say, he made a major decision.

A family member writes, reporting what he had been told by Louis' niece Mina and by his own great-grandparents, that:

“The long drawn-out illness of his father obviously had an effect on the young Ike which created a desire within him to seek the answers and understand the reasons why his father should suffer so long. His wish to study medicine and become a doctor originated at this time...He discussed the matter with his Aunt Ada (Utanga Winiata) and Uncle Wilson (Wirihana Winiata), and in view of the financial difficulties that his family was exposed to as a result of the medical attention required by his dying father, Aunt Ada, who was quite a wealthy woman by local standards, agreed to pay all of Ike's costs while at Otago Medical School...”.

Whether many young people are motivated to pursue a career in medicine by the loss of a parent to disease one cannot say, but certainly Louis' grief in early July 1919 is profoundly evident - as is the sorrow on the faces of Esther and her six other children - in the photograph of the casket outside the Wanganui house a day or two after his father died on July 4, 1919. Mourning for a husband and a father who was in only his fortieth year. He had been central to their lives, a binding force. And it seems that with his passing, went some of the force that tied Louis to his mother and his immediate family. Did he then chose to study at Otago in order to get well away from the memory of his dying father, or to get away from a demanding mother, or more simply because his older Caselberg cousin, Lionel, had taken his medical degree there after service in World War 1, or because of the bond between Ngati Hauiti and the Ngai Tahu tribe (by far the largest in the South Island)? Or simply because three other Maoris had previously attended Otago Medical School?

And we wonder how often, after his departure for Dunedin in early 1920, he returned home again while studying in the South Island. We are not even sure that he did visit his family; and it must be said that information about Louis for most of the 1920s is no more abundant than it is for the first nineteen years of his life.

Having said that, it should also be noted that two letters that Louis wrote from Dunedin to his mother have survived: they were in the Whanganui Regional Museum, but when I requested copies, I was told they would be returned to the Potaka family to deal with, and I have not seen them. Were they poignant letters written about his late father? Perhaps they describe his activities on the rugby field; perhaps they tell of his contacts with Ngai Tahu tribe members in the Dunedin area - of visits to his whanaunga (relatives) living at Otakou Marae, some 25 miles outside Dunedin, (where it is said he entertained the company by playing the violin). Or perhaps they are simple birthday letters Or perhaps he's writing about his academic courses, or reflecting on contemporary medicine and the health services.

Would he have told his family that he had a new nickname at university - 'Spud'?

That interesting tidbit came in one of several letters and electronic messages from the son of the Mackie family that Ike lodged with while at medical school. Now Professor Emeritus (and then living in Nelson), he wrote, in 1996:

“My early home was in Dunedin, and whilst a schoolboy there, at the age of about 15 or 16 my parents, at the behest of a friend accommodated two Otago University medical students, Ernest Fossey and Louis Hauti Potaka at our home in Chamberlain Street, Maori Hill. How long they were there I cannot remember but I got to know them both fairly well...Louis Potaka was about 24 ...I remember him as being a relatively quiet, slightly reserved young man, something of a ‘loner’, good-looking, rather short in stature but well-built... I have a vague recollection that one of the reasons why he came to stay with us was to give himself a better environment for his studies...we lived in a quiet neighbourhood...and he had Fossey available for medical discussions

Louis was a good rugby footballer who played at half-back for a year or so in the Otago University First XV, which has always been one of the premier first-grade teams in Otago, but especially outstanding at that time. I believe he had a falling out with the team management and left the University Club to play for another of the local clubs, Pirates. His participation in the very physical sport of Rugby tends to indicate some need to compete strenuously with others...perhaps this springs from his pioneering spirit .I also remember that he was keen on music and played the violin. I still have a mental picture of him practising at flexing the fingers of his left hand, with corks placed between them to keep them well separated.

Louis had a pleasant personality. He had obviously been well brought up as a youth, and his manners and attitude to others were excellent. He was a ‘nice chap’ in the best sense of that expression. And he had the potential to do well in his profession”.

His lecturers and professors in the Medical School might have echoed Professor Mackie’s last thought, but if so, it would not have been because Louis completed his studies without stumbling a few times. And we infer that to have been the case from the fact that he took nine years to complete the six-year course. Not that taking that long was unique. Indeed, we understand that, in the 1920s, once one had passed the required courses in one’s initial “Intermediate Class” and been accepted in to the Medical School proper, students “could stay indefinitely”...re-sitting courses...”competition not then being what it is today”. In any event, whether Louis’ extended stay at Otago was because he was a poor examinee or he was distracted by other activities, we have no way of telling. We would not be surprised to learn that he showed a special interest in TB, but we have no evidence of that either. The records available at this time (student records, we understand, become “unrestricted after a full 80 years”) merely show that he began in Otago in 1920, completed his studies in 1929 and graduated MB ChB in 1930. (One

admits to contemplating whether Louis' slow progress through Medical School left him with feelings of "insecurity" and low self-esteem, which surfaced in certain situations during the next two or three years, influencing his behaviour and attitude...but, as a layman, one hesitates to argue that that was likely).

As for his sporting activities – he does not, I'm told, appear in the photographs of the rugby First XV teams during the 1920s, but he probably played for another team for a year or two. He is listed as a player for the First XV of the Pirates Club in 1924.

One wonders whether Louis had an opportunity to salt-water fish while at Otago - and perhaps he learned the game of golf there. And more than likely he went hiking with others in the remote hills and mountains to the west. But the only evidence we have of his recreational activities is the photograph (from Neville Lomax's essay, and noted in Section 3 *Illustrations*) of Ike with fifteen compatriots dressed as clowns (I think) at the "Graduation Concert". One has the feeling, however, that Louis Potaka, medical student, was not generally into 'clowning around'. He was more serious-minded; and not likely to forget what Aunt Ada expected of him - or of how he had come to choose the profession of medicine.

When it came time for him work in a hospital for a year, Potaka went to Nelson, not to his native North Island . Whether that was by chance or design we do not know – but it began a connection with the Nelson region that was to continue for the rest of his life. Neither do we know what Esther in Wanganui thought about it - or his benefactor Aunt Ada in Utiku. Wherever he was, the members of his iwi were proud that he was in the medical profession – a takuta - and it doubtless provided considerable mana (prestige) to the tribe. (And it was generally known that Louis was one of only a handful of persons of Maori heritage who had until then earned a degree in medicine). We can imagine that Louis Potaka was happy to have reached the internship stage, and very pleased (and relieved) in 1929 to have completed his course. His professors very likely wished him, and the other graduates, every success in the profession.

In the next phase of his life, he would prove himself as a doctor – but he wouldn't please everybody in town. In fact, Dr Potaka would ruffle a few feathers.

### *3: Doctoring in Nelson, Murchison and Nelson again.*

Louis Potaka was Acting House Surgeon at Nelson Public Hospital for some eighteen months in the late 1920s. Very likely, it seems, he was there, in 1928-1929, serving his internship. Whether he was filling a vacancy created by the resignation of the hospital's resident surgeon, Dr D.C. 'Port' Low, in November, 1928, is not clear. And how he came to apply for a position in Nelson and to be chosen we do not know. We do know (that is, we were told) that records indicate that while there he gave two papers to the "Nelson Clinical Society", a group of doctors who referred to themselves as "The Medicine Men of Nelson". They met monthly to discuss matters of clinical interest, and Potaka's contributions were on "Leucocytosis in Appendicitis" (April, 1928) and "Varicose Veins cured by the Injection Method" (April, 1929). We may assume that, eager to learn from his more experienced colleagues, he attended other meetings of "The Medicine Men", and that Dr Potaka, surgeon, was kept busy at the hospital - but he did find time to plant a grapefruit tree in a very sheltered corner of the hospital grounds (a tree that continued to bear abundantly in the 1990s). And it may be that it was about this time that he became a Freemason, joining the Southern Star Lodge No.735 English Constitution, which was located in Nelson. And perhaps it was in the late 1920s that he met and became friends with the pharmacist H.F. West (who with H.B.T. and U.R.L. West ran Wests' Pharmacy on Hardy Street in Nelson).

Where Louis resided in Nelson, what his colleagues thought of his work - especially hospital Medical Superintendent Dr Frank Hudson - what friends he made and whether he got out into the surrounding regions are some of the unanswered questions about this phase of his life. And it would be interesting to know whether the young Acting House Surgeon in Nelson had occasion to visit the smaller hospitals and nursing homes in the Nelson Hospital Board's (NHB) extensive district - nearby in Motueka, further away in Takaka and Collingwood, and many miles to the southwest in Murchison, one of the remoter of the areas within the NHB's district. In any event, along with the other doctors employed by the NHB, he had very likely heard of the resolution of protest passed by the Murchison County Council (MCC) at a special meeting on March 23, 1929.

The MCC's special meeting on March 23 had been called, Chairman Doug Stewart explained, "as a result of the NHB's intention to reduce or discontinue the doctor's subsidy after one year". And the minutes of the meeting recorded that "Councillor McConochie moved that an emphatic protest be made against any reduction in the subsidy, and against any but a competent man being appointed to the permanent position, even if it means an increase in the subsidy in order to secure the services of a really competent man". Seconded by Councillor Cole, the motion was carried. Some two months later (May 22, 1929), a regular meeting of the MCC "carefully considered the existing medical services; and, after conferring by telephone with the Secretary of the NHB, it was considered impossible to do anything to improve matters at present". At the same meeting, according to the minutes, Chairman Doug Stewart "pointed out that the Doctor's House required certain repairs, and should be painted"; and it was "resolved to ask Mr John Downie or some other competent man to effect the necessary repairs, and to



leave the painting until a “more favourable season”.

The only clue we have to the problem with the existing “unsatisfactory medical services” in 1929 in Murchison is the recollection, offered to me almost seventy years later, that “the resident doctor, some thought, was rather fond of drink and was not doing his job properly as he had no control of his problem”. Be that as it may, after the earthquake of June 17, 1929 (and two weeks of severe tremors), at the MCC meeting on June 29, 1929, it was agreed that a “letter of thanks and appreciation be sent to Dr F.S. McLean (of the New Zealand Health Department) for the splendid work he did here at the time of the earthquake”.

As for the Doctor’s House, on August 22, 1929, when Councillor Newman “referred to the advisability of having the doctor’s house repaired as soon as possible”, the MCC meeting was informed that the Chairman and Clerk “had been making arrangements for this to be done”; but on December 19, 1929, the matter was still the subject of a letter from the Central Earthquake Committee and the MCC resolved to obtain the “necessary information” from the builders and make “application for the amounts required for repairs and re-modelling”. On March 11, 1930, the MCC resolved that “the Doctor’s Residence be repaired as soon as possible” and that tenders should be called for the work. However, on April 29 the MCC was told that the two tenders that had been received were much above the estimates; and the Council decided not to accept them but instead to authorize the Chairman and Clerk to “make all necessary arrangements for repairing and re-modeling the Doctor’s Residence at the estimated cost”. Meanwhile, Dr Potaka had appeared on the scene, though perhaps not literally.

At the MCC meeting of December 19, 1929, a letter received from Potaka was read to members. In it, he advised that he “would be prepared to come to Murchison for three years if the subsidy were increased to 250 pounds per annum”, and the Council resolved “to write to the Minister of Health on the matter, with a view to having the subsidy raised”.

What sort of doctor were the members of the Murchison Medical Council looking for? A sober and competent one, no doubt. And what sort of doctor would the residents of the village and those thinly scattered along the valleys and over the hillsides hope for? One, of course, that was willing and qualified to deal with whatever health problems and emergencies might arise - and whenever and wherever they might arise. And what attracted Louis to the Murchison district? The great outdoors, very probably. If he hadn't already been around the district, he'd heard about its natural attractions - rapids and waterfalls, bush-clad ranges and rugged escarpments. And the prospect of tramping the hills and fishing the streams and lakes must have been appealing. And the remoteness and small-town rural life was probably enticing. Though relatively inexperienced, Dr Potaka's work in Nelson and his Otago training would have been strongly in his favour, and he doubtless impressed MCC members (if we imagine an interview) as a sober, energetic and resourceful young doctor - who might in addition be a useful member of the local rugby club. On April 4, 1930, twenty-nine year old Dr Louis Potaka was offered the position of Medical Officer in Murchison (“succeeding a Dr Comrie”).

And play rugby he did. In the press, in 1979, an old-timer recalled that "Dr Potaka, the new doctor, was a crafty player and with several other newcomers we had an excellent team . The Murchison reps were able to defeat the Nelson reps - a feat unheard of before then". And a comment in an interview in 1998 was "He was a short little fella who enjoyed football and played at halfback, representing Murchison sub union". Whether the other newcomers also boosted the cricket team we don't know; but Louis certainly played that game.

The newcomers were mostly workers - engineers, bricklayers, roadmen - brought in to repair the houses, roads and bridges damaged by the Murchison earthquake of the previous June. And some remained in the district for a number of years. The folk who left the district following the earthquake - "refugees" - included gold-miners, prospectors and some farmers; and we have a photograph of a group of six men who, Mr Bert Spiers told me, had hiked back to retrieve some of the possessions of a farmer who had left his home. There is no doubt that it is Dr Potaka who is holding on to a goat on a rope – the animal having presumably been rescued by the group and on its way to rejoin its owner – but I am not sure how soon after the earthquake they made this trip. Unless Potaka had been in Murchison before his appointment, it may well have been late-1929, even 1930. Whether Louis, if by then the MO, went along in his official capacity is doubtful; more likely he relished the tramp of twenty miles or more - as well as the opportunity to get out of town for a couple of days.

In town, in 1930, he was feuding with the council that had appointed him. One problem concerned the house - the Medical Officer's Residence (the Doctor's House). The NHB had asked the MCC to put the MO's house in order for the new doctor. But this had not been done, although in August, 1930, the builders "had commenced renovations". Three months later, a two-person deputation to the MCC meeting of November 26, 1930, asked whether the Doctor could get "possession of his house and an amicable settlement made". They pointed out that "the Doctor was working under difficulties regarding dispensing at present". What Councilors may have said to the deputation is not recorded, neither is the discussion afterwards: the MCC minutes simply report that "After the deputation withdrew the Council resolved to take no action in the matter". The MCC was clearly not impressed; in fact, it was indifferent to Potaka's problems and quite hostile toward the MO. Under the heading "Doctor's Question", elsewhere in the minutes of that November meeting, it is recorded that the Clerk was instructed to write to the NHB asking for their decision in the "Doctor's Question", also "requesting the return of the Chairman's letters".

While we cannot judge whether the MCC deliberately dragged its feet about the Doctor's House, or whether Potaka's expectations about the renovations were reasonable, and we have not seen the Chairman's letters referred to above, it seems clear that Louis Potaka was pretty assertive and unrestrained in his first five or six months on the job in Murchison. And before considering the events of that period, one is moved to reflect on what drove or motivated Louis.

Was the young doctor, on his own for the first time, on something of an ego or power trip? And was this made worse perhaps because he felt he was not being taken seriously? Would the records reveal - if records we could find - that Dr Louis Potaka expected more respect than some of the leaders in this small community were inclined to show him? And if there was a lack of respect, was this related to his age, or his physical stature or to his Maori extraction, or to the length of time he had taken to complete his medical studies? Or to all four? And we might wonder whether his normally mild and shy manner might not contribute to some persons having the impression that he could be pushed around, manipulated. If the generally placid Louis were inclined to become feisty, to erupt when pushed past his tolerance threshold, one would not be surprised. One recollection, sent to me in 1996, was that "Dr Potaka was a very excitable person who took opposition in a very personal way and became very agitated". I sense that Louis Potaka was to some extent vulnerable and sensitive, even a little insecure - and that he could be hurt and made angry - and that on occasion he'd let his feelings be known.

Another old-timer recollected in an interview in 1998 that Potaka "Was what you'd call impetuous - he'd get an idea about something, and all hell and high water wouldn't stop him". But he also remembered that Louis had "quite a sense of humour":

"One time when Murchison had a seven to eight inches fall of snow in town, he rolled a big snowball up on the balcony of the Hampden Hotel and caught the Scottish secretary Jimmy Bruce, who always wore plus fours and was quite bandy legged, with this snowball, dropped on him from the balcony. Old Jimmy was a character in his own right. When the snowball was dropped, his knees buckled and the doctor thought he might have done him some harm because he was lying on the footpath in the snow; so he rushed down to see if he was alright. Being right in front of the bar door, he took him in and it took half a dozen good whiskies to bring Jimmy round. Jimmy would probably have come round with one - but he probably knew someone else was paying for it",

In any event, on October 1, 1930 (six months after he'd been offered the job in Murchison), the MCC had asked Dr Potaka to resign and leave. He had not been amused, and he had refused. And shortly thereafter he had received a note from the Nelson Health Committee Administration Board saying that he was sacked as the MO for Murchison. Then, one month later, lawyers having asked for "additional evidence", on November 5, 1930, the entry in a NHB minute reads "Hospital solicitors are of the opinion that there were insufficient grounds to dismiss Dr Potaka". The little doctor had evidently reacted - perhaps he had gone to his lawyers and they had threatened litigation and there had been some agitation in the board room in Nelson. And a decision "on the Doctor's Question" (that the MCC was waiting for when it showed its indifference to Potaka's housing and dispensing difficulties in November) was reported in a NHB minute entry for December 12, 1930: "Dr Potaka's dismissal rescinded". And at its December 19, 1930, the MCC received a letter from the NHB with that news. It was also advised at the meeting that the tenant of the doctor's house would be vacating at the end of the month; and the MCC promptly resolved that the Doctor's Residence "be let to the County Clerk". They might

be stuck with Potaka, but they were certainly not going to provide a house! (And six months later, on June 3, 1931, when two ladies appeared before the Council and stated that “unless the Doctor secured a house he intended to leave the district”, the Chairman responded that “as far as the Council was concerned it had no interest in Dr Potaka. The NHB had engaged him and was responsible”).

What provoked the October MCC decision to dismiss Dr Potaka is far from clear. And it will likely remain unclear unless the “Chairman’s letters” come to light. One informant ventured to suggest that Potaka was merely “standing up for the rights of one or more of his patients” – and we would have wished for some clarification about that! In any event, what is clear is that Louis Potaka was assertive, acted recklessly, and got himself into an untenable situation, and was then somewhat contrite; but he had made enemies and they were not forgiving, despite the fact that there were many in the community who liked him. But, we can let the record speak for itself - drawing on the minutes of MCC meetings.

It is August, 1930. Potaka has only been MO in Murchison for a short while. A Special Meeting of the MCC is called for August 19; and brief minutes are taken (and subsequently approved, ten days later). The minutes note that Councillor H.J. Stewart, Chairman of the MCC, stated that he had received letters “addressed to him by Dr Potaka”. The letters were then read, and Stewart announced that he had sent copies of them to the Minister of Health and to the NHB. The five MCC members present then unanimously approved his action in sending the copies; and when they learned that the Minister of Health had suggested that Dr Potaka be given “an opportunity to tender an ample apology to the Chairman”, they unanimously rejected the idea, resolving that “this council cannot entertain the suggestion of an apology in view of what has been written by Dr Potaka”. And then after hearing in person from Chairman Smith of the NHB and its secretary and a member of the NHB, the MCC unanimously resolved that the NHB “be requested to ask Dr Potaka for his resignation”. And then, tantalizingly, we read that: “Dr Potaka also addressed the Council and offered to apologize for his attitude”, and that: “In answer to the Chairman, he stated that his action in writing the offensive letters was due to a sudden outburst of temper”. The final sentence of the August 19 minutes reads: “In consideration of the injury to Dr Potaka’s professional career that may result from publication of a report of the proceedings, the press was asked to publish nothing”.

At another Special Meeting on September 5, 1930, Chairman Stewart and colleagues dealt with a letter from the NHB and a petition forwarded to them by the NHB. The minutes record that of the 691 signatures on the petition, 121 were ratepayers; and that it was resolved that the “Council adhere to its former position to ask for Dr Potaka’s resignation”, the Board to be informed that only 121 ratepayers had signed and “probably none of those were aware of the whole facts”. (They had not seen Potaka’s letters to the Chairman). The Chairman was authorized to give notice that the “Council would not be responsible for Dr Potaka’s board and lodging after he receives notice from the Board to resign”.

Several weeks later, a deputation of three person “waited on the Council with regard

to the Doctor's dismissal", according to the minutes of the MCC meeting for October 23, 1930. The speakers did not, however, "bring up any fresh ground on which the Council should alter its decision", and it was resolved that the Council adhere to its previous decision. The same minutes make it clear that Councilors continued to be outraged by Potaka's letters to their Chairman: "The question of forwarding copies of the Doctor's letters to the Postmaster-General, Mr Black M.P., and the British Medical Association was discussed, and the Clerk was instructed to communicate with Mr Brodie as to the legal aspect".

It's likely that many people in the community wondered why the doctor's house was not speedily made available for Dr Potaka, their new MO; and perhaps there were letters to the editor in the local newspapers. It's also likely that not many persons were fully informed about the circumstances surrounding his sacking, or his subsequent reinstatement; and that there must have been many rumours – though whether any were noted in the local papers is perhaps doubtful. Were Potaka's offensive letters to Chairman Stewart kept secret? Did members of the press actually hear them read to the MCC? Were their contents leaked to some members of the community? Have they (the letters) survived? (In the Ministry's archives? In the attic of a descendant of Chairman Stewart?). Was the MO's house eventually fixed up for and occupied by Potaka? (It was presumably a significant benefit of the job). We don't know the answers to these questions. Did the feud of 1930 dampen Louis' enthusiasm for the district and his readiness to respond to patients? We have some evidence in letters written about those days.

In a letter written in 1987 a banker friend of his in Murchison recalled that:

"He was very popular and the people of the district were very sorry when he left... While he, and I, were in Murchison, I remember an incident when he asked me to accompany him to a distant valley to visit a sick patient, an elderly man. He came out of the house a short while later, and invited me inside to help him 'lay out' the man, who had died a short while before. A 'first' for me, and traumatic, which I have not forgotten.

My wife also remembers Dr Potaka as a kindly man who was at home with the farming community in Murchison, always enquiring how the crops were, what was the price for butterfat, did the recent flood do any damage and what was the name of the latest grandchild, and so forth. She remembers him on her father's farm as a vet. He was also a 'stand-in' dentist; an excellent baby-doctor and a good 'bone-man': he had many fractures to deal with. We both remember his large collie dog which always lay across the top of the seat behind the doctor, and which shed yellow hair on one's shoulders!"

One who had experienced his dental work wrote, in 1996, that:

"Dr Potaka was in the Murchison area soon after the disastrous earthquake in 1929 that devastated the District and claimed seventeen lives (mostly by

huge slips). We owned the transport system at that time so we were in contact with Potaka a lot as he had no car or other means of transport.

He had to cope with very primitive conditions and used a hotel bedroom next to his at the hotel where he stayed. He was a rather likeable little chap and was well liked, so fitted in very well. I personally have a vivid memory of him during that time: I developed toothache and there was no dentist within miles so he decided the tooth had to come out. He duly injected the necessary, laid me on the bed and proceeded to remove it. Unfortunately the serum must have been old for it did not work and I will never forget those few minutes he took to extract the offender. As a Doctor he was very good and coped with he had to work under extremely well."

It would not be the last time that Dr Potaka pulled a tooth, or had primitive conditions under which to operate. Much of his work at this time was, of course, done in the Murchison Hospital, as a former patient recalled, in 1996:

"I remember Dr Potaka had a room in the two-storied Hampden Hotel in Murchison (the hotel is still there and in use). My mother had to take me up these narrow steep stairs to see Dr Potaka. Either toward the end of 1929 or in 1930, when I was eleven years old, Dr Potaka operated on my eye. There was an abscess behind the eye and he had to give me an anesthetic. It was all done in the small Murchison Hospital and Matron Whyllie said if he hadn't been a clever Doctor, I would have had to have gone to Nelson Hospital, two hours' drive north of Murchison...The night before the operation I was sitting with the Matron's family and could hardly keep awake when Dr Potaka called in and said to the Matron could she put me to bed - he'd like me to have a good sleep. Was I grateful! You can see what a caring person he was. I remember he carried me from the Operating Table to my bed.

Later, another abscess was growing in the corner of my eye, so I had to go back to hospital to have an anesthetic that didn't put me right under like the first one - yet I had no fear of going back, so proves as a child had no fear of Dr Potaka - he must have been a kind person, especially to children.

I've never forgotten his face. He was a nice-looking young man. The County Council had a house for a Doctor, but didn't allow him to have it. He wasn't a favourite of some of the Councilors. I never knew exactly why"

And from another person, born in Motueka (at the Cottage Hospital) at the time Potaka was the Medical Officer in Murchison but from 1934 onwards a resident in the Glenroy Valley, we received, in 1996, more information about Murchison - and his late

uncle's story about Dr Potaka:

"Murchison was surveyed first in 1864 as the hamlet of Hampden, a staging post to the several small gold fields... the name was changed in the 1870s...and George Moonlight, who died alone in the bush, prospecting during 1884, has been recognised as the Father or Founder of Murchison...The 'Lost Tribe of the Glenroy' were a group of miners who fossicked for gold along the Glenroy River, many miles south of the town. The diggers congregated at the Mammoth Hotel (now gone) in Matakitaiki further north in the Matakitaiki Valley where Tom May the publican encouraged roistering...Tom, like many other pioneers, drowned while crossing the Matakitaiki River in 1896...In the 1930s, Murchison was still very isolated; the roads were still clay, the creeks unbridged. The eighty miles from Nelson took about four hours to travel...Uncle Dave and Louis Potaka met on the roadside, probably in 1933...

They must have been as unlike as chalk and cheese: the educated Maori doctor from North Island, and the ginger-headed gold-seeking Celtic bushman whose life never took him far from home. But they became friends for life when they met at the roadside in a storm...where a creek joined the Glenroy...

Called to a lady in childbirth, the Doctor took three hours or so in his car to reach Rifleman's Creek, about 21 miles south of Murchison and an east-bank tributary of the northward-flowing Glenroy, and there was still a couple of miles to go to reach his patient. At Rifleman's the assistance of the men who tried to push and drag his car thru' the swollen creek was futile. There was no way to get across, even on horseback. Except...

Upstream a trestle had been built above the stream bed to carry a water pipe about 20 inches in diameter and eighty-odd feet long - the water for a gold claim further down the valley. And the assembled men told Louis about this 'bridge', though several suggested it might not survive the flood. Dave told Louis he had himself used it to cross Rifleman's about an hour or two before - and would have to again; it was his only way of getting home. Uncle Dave said Louis never hesitated. He reached for his bag in the car and asked Dave to lead the way into the gathering dusk, while the rain tumbled down.

Dave wore his miner's long gum boots, but Louis had only his leather boots or shoes. Dave never knew how the Doctor kept his footing as they climbed the track... the narrow path between creek and surrounding scrub. They had to hurry, night was coming too soon as the storm raged about them. Fallen branches Dave cleared with an axe, reaching a hand back to aid the doctor, who was always ready to push on. Within a few minutes, Dave said, some rapport had grown between the two men. They were both

bloody scared; but there was only one thing to do - go on!

Dave's father was waiting on the other side at the crossing, his voice barely reaching them in the dusk above the noise of the creek and crashing trees in the stormy night. He held a lantern to mark the other side - a candle burning in the neck of a beer bottle, the bottom cut away, a wire twist for a handle. A light to aim for!! Louis looked at the crossing, then grinned at Dave. So this it! Been nice knowing you, Dave! Let's get on, will we? (that's the way Dave told it, many years later).

A few minutes later the two were straddling the pipe twenty feet above the raging creek. Dave had begun walking upright as he usually did, but finding it slippery he'd dropped to crawl on hands and knees. Behind him Louis straddled the water pipe, feet either side, heaving himself forward, his doctor's bag pushed ahead between his arms.

How long did it take? The men talked about it later: Louis said it was hours; Dave agreed; Joe watching from the other bank said it was the longest ten minutes of his life - if either man had fallen, there was only death waiting below.

The walk to Dave's house was now only twenty minutes, the three gripping poles as they waded through another creek up to their waists. On the verandah they stripped and donned dry clothes, Louis in Dave's only suit - his bushman's best.

Then for Louis another journey in the darkness, the last couple of miles on horseback guided by the fretting father-to-be. And during the night a safe delivery in a crude miner's shack up the valley. Then next day, Doctor Potaka sat with Dave and family members for a meal and a yarn - and a friendship was born".

All the uncles and aunts of the family thereafter held Dr Potaka in high regard and, the writer tells us, spoke of him always "with sincere affection". He may have been, it was suggested, the first Maori that they had ever met; and he adds: "I never believed Louis Potaka had problems with his being of Maori descent in Murchison. The few Maoris in that district were accepted as New Zealanders and treated as fellow workers and friends, drinking in the same bars and sharing love and friendship".

Did Louis Potaka ever experience "problems" because of his Maori origins? There were no incidents to include in the previous section of this essay - though one may have wondered whether the other Potakas would have felt comfortable with the 'Spud' nickname he was given in Otago. And the reader will judge whether the passing references to his descent in this section - as well as those in the following sections - are significant in his story. It would be extraordinary, one feels, if he had not been sensitive to the way others regarded and treated him, both pakeha and Maori - and especially



perhaps Maori whose parents were both Maori. How did he really feel when asked whether he thought he could live in a colder climate? We haven't found the answer to that question – but neither have we any answers to questions about his Jewish origins. Was there a Jewish community in Murchison with whom he would have had some special association?

Back in Murchison, Dr Potaka would not have experienced the physical challenges he did that stormy night in the Glenroy Valley – but he was having problems of another sort, if the tales are to be believed. He had continued to serve as the Medical Officer after the 1930 clash with the authorities, but the prospects of reappointment after his term expired in June 1933 must have been pretty bleak. And we would not be surprised if he'd prudently made enquiries about openings elsewhere – or was Louis still in a feisty mood and ready to do battle again to stay on as the MO?

Very probably, no reasons had to be given to justify a decision not to reappoint him. And it may be that some councilors would not have wished publicly to have debated the issue. We don't know how it was handled but it's highly unlikely that Dr Potaka was invited to a meeting to respond to a number of complaints. If he had been, the complaints, it seems, would have included allegations that he had appeared to have upset a number of local persons by refusing to give them prescriptions for medicines and pills for conditions that he believed were due to promiscuous behaviour; and that he'd gone out of his way to pry into the private lives of patients, ferreting out information and gossip, and then spreading it around in the community.

In 1984, one old-timer wrote that: “Unfortunately, Dr Potaka blotted his copybook badly before he left the district, getting mixed up with a lot of mud-slinging about local people. And there was one man in particular, a leading member of the community, who seemed to be a prime target”.

We have no information to back up these comments and the allegations (or rumours of allegations); and we cannot think what might have motivated a professional person to engage in such behaviour. Did the rough and tumble of pioneering days in isolated communities include unsavoury disputes between prominent persons? Whatever the truth may be, Louis had evidently ruffled a few feathers in Murchison. And on June 14, 1933, the axe fell: “Dr Potaka's term as MO for the Murchison District expired on June 9, and he is not reappointed”.

And the minutes of the Nelson Hospital Board meeting of June 14 record further that the Murchison County Council had advised the NHB that they had decided to have applications called for the position of Medical Officer for their District. And the NHB proposed that the MCC handle the matter “with a view to enabling the MCC to embody such local conditions concerning the appointment, duties etc as may be deemed necessary”. The NHB would receive the applications marked in order of preference and would make the appointment... and the MCC could count on the continuation of the subsidy of 200 pounds per annum for a period of three years.

It's unlikely that Louis was called upon for his input into the formulation of the 'local conditions' the MCC included – but he may well have influenced what they were.

If Dr Potaka was aggrieved by his non-reappointment and consulted his lawyer, nothing came of it. If he wrote home and told Esther and Aunt Ada that he was out of a job, the letters have not come to light. If there was a petition in Murchison to have him stay on, we have no details (though one lady remembers that her parents signed such a petition – but perhaps it was the 1930 petition). And exactly when he packed his bags and left town with his collie dog (and whether his salary had been sufficient for him to own a car so that he drove out of town, the collie in the back), we don't know. All we are sure of is that on September 13, 1933, three months after he was “not reappointed” in Murchison, Dr Potaka was appointed as Temporary House Surgeon at the Nelson Public Hospital. Dr F Hudson was still Medical Superintendent there and obviously Potaka's skills were still appreciated.

Bruised, probably, by the controversies in Murchison, and perhaps a little wiser, and possibly somewhat dejected about being so far from the fish in Lake Rotoroa - he and Maori Jimmy Smith of the Ministry of Works were the first to fish the lake after it had been stocked with brown and rainbow trout - and the streams in the Murchison area, Louis may have wondered where he should move onto, in due course, from Nelson. Apparently the Temporary House Surgeon had time for, or made time for, some quiet reflection.

One doctor who had returned to his parents' home in Nelson at this time after completing his own studies remembers that when there was an emergency at the hospital and Louis was needed but could not be found, the ambulance would be dispatched to bring him back from where he was sure to be – “down at the harbour, lying on his back and dangling a fishing line in the water”.

Some doubtless thought this behaviour a little eccentric and curious. But they may have also considered his decision to accept a post in Samoa a little curious (although, as Potaka would have known, Dr Ned Ellison, a fellow Maori and Otago graduate, had briefly been in Samoa and was at that time the Chief Medical Officer in the Cook Islands), and perhaps even more so, his quick decision, in February 1934, to forget Samoa and head in a rather more southerly direction.

#### ***4: Antarctic Experience***

Dr Louis Potaka's Antarctic experience resulted from his involvement with the Second Byrd Antarctic Expedition (BAE2). If he had any special interest in the white continent before that involvement, evidence of it has not come to light - and those who knew him in Utiku and Wanganui, and at Otago University and in Murchison and Nelson do not recall that he spoke of the Antarctic. Doubtless, however, as a youth he'd followed the exploits of Scott, Shackleton, and Amundsen, and it's not unreasonable to suppose that he had been aware of Byrd's first Antarctic Expedition (BAE1,1928-1930) and that he was generally informed about the progress of BAE2, including the departure of the *Jacob Ruppert* from Wellington on December 6, 1933, and the *Bear of Oakland* on January 10, 1934; and the arrivals of these two expedition vessels at the Bay of Whales on January 17, 1934, and January 31, 1934, respectively.

Louis would not have known, however, that when the *Ruppert* left the Ice on February 5, 1934, to return to New Zealand BAE2's ailing Dr Guy Shirey was on board and that Byrd had resolved to get a replacement doctor "regardless of cost or consequence - or else cancel the expedition" (DISCOVERY, p.102).

On February 4, the day before Shirey left the Ross Ice Barrier, Byrd had in fact sent a radio message to his agent in Wellington explaining the situation.

It read, in part:

MUST GET A DOCTOR SOMEHOW STOP PLEASE MOVE  
HEAVEN AND EARTH TO GET COMPETENT DOCTOR TO  
VOLUNTEER HELP US OUT STOP INFORM DUNCAN IN  
DUNEDIN OF SITUATION AND ASK HIM TO HELP GET DOCTOR.

The leader of BAE2 followed a couple of days later with :

ASK IN NEWSPAPERS FOR VOLUNTEER DOCTOR.

And very soon thereafter Dr Louis Potaka in Nelson would have become aware of Byrd's appeal in the local press for a fully qualified doctor and a surgeon to serve for at least twelve months. When and how, however, we do not know. Did he spot the appeal himself, perhaps on February 7 or 8, or was it shown to him by a friend or colleague or family member? And did he unhesitatingly decide he wanted to go South?

Certainly Potaka did not wait very long to respond, because he was referred to in a radio message that went from Wellington to Byrd on February 9.

Byrd was advised:

NO DOCTORS VOLUNTEERING STOP THE FEW APPLICANTS

OFFERING ASK FOR FROM 300 TO 2000 POUNDS NEW ZEALND  
CURRENCY STOP DUNCAN HAS TWO YOUNG DOCTORS  
JUST PASSED THROUGH MEDICAL SCHOOL AND NOW  
SERVING IN HOSPITALS EACH REQUIRE 350 POUNDS .

The message continued with:

NONE AVAILABLE WELLINGTON STOP BUT ONE IN NELSON  
THOROUGHLY CAPABLE MAN HIGHLY RECOMMENDED  
STOP BUT HE IS ONE THIRD MAORI IN BLOOD WOULD THIS  
DISQUALIFY HIS FEE ALSO 350 POUNDS.

From down South, Byrd soon came back with:

WILLING TO PAY THE MAORI 350 POUNDS STOP HE LOOKS  
LIKE THE BEST HAVE NO OBJECTIONS TO HIS BEING ONE  
THIRD MAORI STOP HE HAD BETTER BRING INSTRUMENTS  
HE HAS

And Louis was very shortly on the bus to Christchurch and then to Dunedin, where he joined the British research ship *Discovery 11*, Admiral Byrd having been successful in his plea that the vessel call at Dunedin and pick up his relief doctor and rendezvous with the *Bear of Oakland* at 72 degrees South Latitude. Assuming the copy of the newspaper photograph sent from the Golden Bay Museum is of Dr Potaka being greeted by three offices as he arrives on board the *Discovery*, it seems that he was pleased to be on his way to join BAE2. Whether he enjoyed the next several days at sea we do not know; indeed, we do not know whether he had previously made any sea journey longer than the crossing from the North Island to South Island.

In DISCOVERY Byrd provides some details of his efforts to find a doctor and to get a vessel to bring him South, and there are many messages in the archives sent hither and thither in those early days of February, 1934, that tell more about his struggles to solve the twin problems. In April 1988, Mr Jim Caffin told me of his recollections of 54 years earlier. The Antarctic Division of the D.S.I.R. had alerted me to Mr Caffin in 1986 when I wrote asking questions about Byrd's expeditions, and Jim kindly came to the Windsor Private Hotel in Christchurch in April, 1988. Jim Caffin's father had been, in 1934, the local manager for a Canadian shipping line – this may have been Canadian National Steamships - and he had been associated with H.L. Tapley & Co of Dunedin, who acted for Byrd in certain matters. Jim himself was then working for the *Star* and its morning newspaper *The Christchurch Times*. And he was on the late night shift on February 4, 1934, when his father called from the United Services Hotel and told him there was a good story for the paper about BAE2: Byrd had radioed that Dr Shirey was leaving the expedition and he needed a replacement doctor. He and James Duncan of Tapleys were discussing how to obtain a doctor in a hurry, and young Jim's original story then appeared in *The Times* and *Star*. To obtain a doctor, Caffin and Duncan arranged advertisements in the press, *The Times* coming out with "Doctor Needed: A Call for

Volunteers” on February 8. The next day it was reported that an offer from a Dr Potaka had been received, and on February 12 *The Press* noted that Dr Potaka had been chosen. Young Jim had met Potaka when he had arrived in Christchurch from Nelson en route to Dunedin. Concerning the problem of how to get the doctor down to the Antarctic, Jim Caffin said that he had remembered that the Royal Research Society’s vessel *Discovery II* was in Auckland and might be able to assist. Duncan had told Byrd and thus it came to pass that *Discovery II* took Potaka south to rendezvous with the Bear. Byrd had thanked Jim for the suggestion, Jim said, when Byrd returned to Dunedin in 1935.

Whether Byrd - who wrote in DISCOVERY that he “suddenly remembered” about *Discovery II* , (p.103) - publicly acknowledged young Jim’s bright idea , I do not know. We can say that although he subsequently exaggerated when he said that there had been a “plenitude” of candidates from which the highly recommended Dr Potaka had been chosen (p.104), he was entirely accurate when he wrote that Potaka was swiftly chosen.

Unfortunately, neither Potaka’s letter of application and the information provided by his referees nor any notes of an interview seem to have survived. One supposes that Louis would have mentioned his service (both medical and dental) in remote Murchison and his love of and experience with dogs; but he did not seek to ensure his selection by volunteering. On the other hand, he did set his fee low enough to give himself a realistic chance of being recruited. Duncan of Tapleys was quoted in *The Press* of February 12 as saying that Dr Potaka was chosen because of his “greater experience than any of the other younger applicants”. And America learned from Sir Hubert Wilkins’ cable to *The New York Times* that Dr Potaka, a young Maori physician of Nelson, New Zealand, was joining the *Discovery* on his way to Little America as relief doctor on Admiral Byrd’s staff (*NYT*, February 15).

Choosing to go to the Antarctic was one of the major decisions in Louis’ life (even, arguably the most critical decision). In significance, it was not far behind his decision to study medicine and the decision, after BAE2, to accept a position in Takaka. But all that we know about that decision can be recorded in a few lines.

Potaka had been on the point of accepting an appointment in Samoa - presumably Western Samoa (at that time; but now Samoa) - and departing thence when the BAE2 opportunity arose. Byrd wrote that Potaka “chose the polar regions as against the tropics (so he told me later) because the experience promised to be more novel” (p.104). Potaka said he had decided in favour of the Antarctic as “being more interesting”. And he had told the press in answer to a question about why he had offered himself to BAE2 : “Well, they wanted somebody, and I happened to be free”. The following paragraph reporting on that 1934 interview is of interest:

“Dr Potaka was asked whether he thought the cold of the polar regions would suit him, since he was a full-bloodied Maori, but replied bravely: ‘Wait and see. That is hard to say yet’. The same answer was made when he was asked if he intended to spend the full year with the expedition, but he added: ‘I might not last as long as that myself’. Under pressure, he

admitted that if all went well he would probably stay in Little America until the expedition returned.”

One detects that Potaka did not take seriously most of the questions asked - and he would have known that there was no way home once the pack ice had firmed up until the following summer. And one is inclined to suggest that Louis' decision to join BAE2 was made pretty much on the spur of the moment – he had not been waiting for a chance to explore the unknown and tread upon wide and empty white landscapes. Neither had he been waiting for an opportunity to see firsthand how men reacted to living at close quarters and several months of darkness. But he must have wondered in early February whether he personally would find it testing.

And so, with Potaka aboard, *Discovery II* sailed south from Dunedin to rendezvous with the *Bear* at 72 degrees south a week later. And photographer Alfred Saunders on *Discovery* got a shot of the two vessels together at the entrance to the Ross Sea – and we have his account (*A Camera in Antarctica*, 1950, p.126 and p.128) of the meeting, with snow falling, visibility down to less than a mile and a strong, cold wind which made it difficult for the vessels to come alongside each other.

“It was ten o'clock – too late to start transferring stores – so we spent the rest of the evening fraternizing. There was a dry ship so the evening was spent on the *Discovery II* and by one o'clock in the morning when the Americans returned to the *Bear of Oakland* ours was nearly dry too.”

Early next morning our sailors were busy transferring the stores. The job was finished about midday, and bidding farewell to the Americans, we turned in the direction of the Falklands. As the *Bear of Oakland* pulled away from us she ran up flags, but since I could never read these I did not know if they read 'Good-bye and good luck' or just 'Thanks for the drinks'”.

Saunders may well have photographed Louis at the impromptu party and the next day being transferred and waving farewell to his British hosts, and perhaps clutching the most valuable of his surgical instruments. But Dr Potaka's exact movements on February 22 and 23 we do not know.

What went through Dr Potaka's mind as the *Bear* then struggled south for four days through the pack ice to the Barrier and the Bay of Whales, and when they finally arrived there, through the sea smoke, on February 26? We may never know. If, like the doctor he was replacing, he had second thoughts about wanting to stay on the Ice, they are not recorded, certainly not by Byrd.

The Admiral's story of BAE2 does, however, report Potaka's initial journey by tractor from the Bay to Little America, and it is one of a dozen or so references in DISCOVERY to Potaka. Remembering that Byrd and Charles Murphy (Byrd's friend, Communications Officer, ghost writer and PR man) were writing and reporting (to the *NYT* every few days during the expedition) for a public that wanted dramatics and

success stories and that they were not inclined to either criticise their stout-hearted colleagues of the Ice Party or reveal the internal stresses that beset BAE2, those dozen references provide a useful outline of Potaka's experience on the Ice.

What Byrd tells us of Potaka's selection as the replacement for Shirey and of the drama of arranging his passage to join BAE2 come, of course, early in Byrd's account. And the initial tractor ride soon follows: the new medico is "dark, solidly built, with a good-humoured face, an English accent and Maori blood in his veins" (p.128). And not much later - within, in fact, a fortnight - the doctor is professionally in action. There is a minor operation on the cervical glands below the angle of the right jaw of Rawson ("The doctor went about his business quietly and efficiently" p.142) and then a few days later an emergency appendectomy on Pelter - and Murphy pulled out all the stops for that in order to catch the eye of readers of the *NYT* - "White-Clad Explorers Huddle Round Rude Table to Aid Doctor in Appendectomy" (March 19,1934); and the account in *DISCOVERY* was no less exciting. And, indeed, given that it began with a fire, there was much to be excited about. Byrd notes "the crisp British way" Louis called for instruments during the operation and that "short, dark and dynamic, "Potaka cut "deftly and with sureness" (p.149). He had not been so deft a few minutes earlier when he had caused the fire by starting to fill a pressure lamp from a gasoline drum when there was still flame in the mantle, but Byrd was not one to blame his men for any accidents that occurred. What is more interesting in the light of what was to come, is whether Potaka suffered any burns and in particular any injury to his eyes "when the stream of gasoline ignited in Dr Potaka's face and, startled, he dropped the lamp" (p.148).. Had another member of the party been burned, he would surely have been examined by the doctor - but who examined and wrote a report on the doctor?

In the 1930s motion picture "DISCOVERY: The story of the second polar expedition" (NWDNM 200.382) the two or three seconds of film of the group around the sick Pelter (in Reel 5) don't allow us to identify the doctor (or any of his "green assistants"); and in his commentary Admiral Byrd does not mention Potaka by name - but he does say with some emphasis: "I was glad to have that doctor!"

In any event, life for the expedition's doctor for the next five or six months was mostly an uneventful mixture of "arranging his room" (p.184), "playing chess" (p.217), monthly medical examinations of the other men of the Winter Party (p.184), rooting into the buried caches of BAE1 (p.191), making wooden boxes and doctoring frostbitten faces (p.225). Whether Louis' routine included regular attendance at the movies that were shown (some of them, over and over again), is not known; but he is certainly in the photograph (*National Geographic*, 1935, p.417, third from the right in the back row) of the group of 39 men watching "Forty Second Street" in the Mess Hall on the night of June 23, 1934. Neither do we know that he was conducting any experiments or research, though he is clearly in the photograph of the Scientific Staff (p.204). He certainly extracted teeth when that was necessary - as revealed in the motion picture and in the two photographs noted in my Appendix 2 - and it is not unlikely that he was consulted by a man or two perplexed if not anguished by the long winter night, including the designated Assistant Postmaster.

It was as the winter night was ending in August, 1934, that Potaka's life became a little more eventful – when young Bill McCormick crashed in the auto-giro. Potaka had to deal with a fractured left arm and a man in shock (p.242). In September it was still really cold and Potaka recommended “no physical labor be undertaken in temperatures lower than - 45 degrees on account of frosting of the lungs” (p.243). And in October he showed excitement when the biologists reported that they had seen fish, leading Byrd to write that “It was all they could do to restrain Dr Potaka from going...He was a passionate angler, and was counting the days before he would again be wading his favourite trout stream in New Zealand ” (p.296). Which makes one wonder whether Louis was homesick during his stay on the Ice. And whether he told his companions about the streams in Murchison district and the natural delights of his native land. There is no evidence, incidentally, that he lectured to his fellow expedition members on his specialty, as several others in the group of explorers did.

There is some evidence that he contributed his talents in another direction. Charlie Murphy recorded that Dr Potaka – “our foremost antiquarian” – had recovered from a long-buried BAE1 cache “a case or two of Dr Baxter's Lung Preserver (alcohol content about 28%)...and a neat little still”, and added that: “In spite of the combined technical abilities of the medical officer, biologist, geologist and senior aviation officer, all with their tongues hanging out”, the elixir no matter how often it passed through the distillery “remained Dr Baxter's Lung Preserver” (p.191).

A later reference to Potaka indicates that he was also consulted about the health of the cows, and in December, 1934, he recommended that Klondike, who was suffering from frost-bite and a ghastly sore, be destroyed (p.334).

The final (but non-indexed) reference to Potaka in Byrd's DISCOVERY refers to his weighing the four men who had returned on December 29, 1934, and January 2, 1935, from lengthy exploratory land journeys (p.350).

It is certain that Louis would have relished an extended journey away from Little America, but, of course, he was tied by his role to the expedition's base. And that would have prevented him from accompanying the tractor party that went out to Admiral Byrd when the leader was obviously in distress alone at Advance Base. It surely, however, did not prevent him professionally advising Byrd about his health during these months - but if he had any input it is omitted from the official story of BAE2. Byrd does note, however, that when he planned to join an exploratory flight in November, 1934, a few weeks after his return from Advance Base, Potaka “urged me not to attempt a long flight”, with heart muscles that were still tired (p.289). And, later, in his book *Alone* (1938, Putnam's), Byrd tells readers that on that occasion “The medico said that if I flew I should have only myself to blame for the consequences”. (We know, of course, that the Admiral went, as the navigator, on that 7-hour flight – just as we know that twenty-three years later he died of heart failure). And, as far as I recall, Dr Thomas Poulter, who was left in charge of Little America while Byrd was alone, did not record a single thing in his little journal (deposited in the National Archives in Washington, D.C.) about Potaka and



Byrd's health.

Tom Poulter does, however, record that on May 25, 1934, "Dr Potaka found 13 quarts of vanilla extract in the BAE1 tunnel" – which he (Poulter) decided to dump (presumably because of its alcohol content); and when confiding to his diary his thoughts on June 2, 1934, about the problem of drinking and drunkenness in Little America, Poulter reports that one colleague got badly stewed ...and the "Dr is going to try to put him under ...with something to make him sleep" (Poulter Diary, p.122).

In January, 1935, Dr Potaka was presumably as busy as his fellow explorers packing for his imminent departure from Antarctica; and his home-made wooden boxes were now being put into service! After the arrival of the *Bear* with the mail on January 19 there was for "the next few hours scarcely a sound except for the tearing of envelopes, the riffling of pages" (DISCOVERY, p.376); and very likely there were more items for Louis than the two that have come to light, and that he responded to through the special Post Office. And then during the first few days of February he was doubtless busy ensuring that along with his sea chests his forty-odd boxes were safely transported to the edge of the Ice and loaded on the *Ruppert*. What Louis might have murmured to himself as the *Ruppert* pulled away from Antarctica we do not know, but he was to give a reporter something to write about when he arrived in Dunedin.

At this point, however, we would note some further information about his twelve months in Antarctica that were now ending.

Byrd sent a radio message on February 21 to Potaka then on *Discovery II*. It reflected the unjustified concern that the departing doctor (Guy Shirey) had not properly provisioned BAE2.

Byrd' message said:

WE CANNOT FIND ANY SOLID NARCOTICS IN OUR MEDICAL  
SUPPLIES PLEASE ENDEAVOUR TO BUY OR BORROW FROM  
CAPTAIN NELSON AS MUCH COCAINE AND MORPHINE AS  
POSSIBLE ALSO AS MUCH NOVOCAINE AS POSSIBLE IN ANY  
FORM AVAILABLE

Dr Shirey, a day later, as it happened, sent the following message to Potaka:

I AM INFORMED THAT YOU ARE THERE CONGRATULATIONS  
AND HEARTFELT BEST WISHES IN CARRYING ON THE WORK I  
HAVE LONGED A LIFETIME TO DO AM GREATLY RELIEVED  
EN ROUTE HOME

Dr Shirey, we should record, was not slow to remark to Byrd that adequate medical supplies were in storage at Little America; and we note that the mention of cocaine in Byrd's first message is, ironical, as we shall see later. And from Shirey's handwritten

note for the radio operator, I am not able to be certain that Shirey is saying that he is greatly relieved because Potaka is there to replace him or because he (Shirey) is not there but is heading home (to Tucson, Arizona) – perhaps for both reasons! In any event, Dr Potaka sent a brief message to Shirey in Tucson on May 24 saying “Many thanks for your radiogram. Trust that you are quite well. All OK here. Regards from Harold (June) and Self”. And the Ohio archives (with copies of hundreds of BAE2 radiograms) also yielded a message from Potaka to Brent Balchen (pilot with the Ellsworth Trans-Antarctic Expedition): dated May 24, 1934, Potaka sent his best regards and told Balchen to “keep his promise about meeting me in Little America!” (Ellsworth had bad luck in the Antarctic, and so no “meeting” took place).

Then we have a few sentences from broadcasts made from Little America - the “Hallo America” weekly series that Charles Murphy almost certainly scripted. From some of the typed scripts that Radio Operator John Dyer presented to the National Archives in Washington, D.C., we learn that very early on Potaka said “I daresay no doctor ever received a stranger hurry-call, but I am delighted to serve under Admiral Byrd...A few men are laid up with snowblindness and minor ailments, otherwise the health of the camp is excellent”. About the appendectomy, Potaka remarked that “It was difficult only in the sense that we lacked the usual conveniences”. On June 20, 1934, his comment was “The men are standing up well to the trying period of darkness”. He did not say that almost all of them were busy writing diaries - or that he was or wasn’t keeping a journal!

And we know that Louis sent radio messages from Little America to a number of friends in New Zealand during 1934 (including Dr D.C.Low and pharmacist H.F.West in Nelson and Gertude Batchelor in Christchurch), requesting them to reply via Captain English on the *Bear of Oakland* moored in Dunedin. Unfortunately, his messages we have not unearthed - so we don’t know whether he had any significant comments or information for his friends - but a number of those he received (transmitted to Little America by Captain English) turned up in a file in Dunedin in 1998.

From Murchison, John Downie’s radiogram transmitted from Dunedin on August 5, 1934, read: “Delighted to get your goodwill message. All mentioned are well, and send best wishes to you. Murchison has many new buildings and had good winter. All my people are well. And Wife and I send kindest regards, and hope you are enjoying your interesting experience”; and later in the year, in November, Downie wrote: “Your friends here all well and send greetings. Fishing is quiet this year. Can we send you anything by the *Bear*? Hope you are keeping well and we are looking forward to seeing you soon. Kindest regards from wife and self.” And from A.Fleming of Longford, Murchison, the message sent via the *Bear* in October was: “Greetings from Longford. All well here. Hope same ditto. Jock and Jill well. Letter following”. The unpunctuated August telegram, signed “LITTLE” and postmarked Lower Hutt, transmitted from Dunedin to Potaka was not all good news:

“WIFE BEEN DANGEROUSLY ILL PAT WELL SIX PUPPIES FIVE  
DOGS TWO BLUES BOTH DIED ALL BEAUTIFULLY MARKED  
AND STRONG BITCH PUP GOOD DOG DISLOCATED SHOULDER

## RECOVERING SENT DOG KEITH KINDEST REGARDS”

Keith is mentioned in the November message from the Wests of Hardy Street, Nelson: “Rex looking perfect .Keith’s dog well except leaky valves. All well here. Request being attended to. Have written and writing again”. And Rex was described as “fine and getting fat” in a message from “ULRIC” (the son of Henry Francis West, and also “M.P.S”).

Dr D.C.Low of Nile Street, Nelson, wrote in December,1934, asking Captain English if he “would be good enough to send the following message to Dr L.H.Potaka with the expedition in the Antarctic : Compliments of the season: hope to see you at next Xmas”. And Dr J.P.S. Jamieson of 129, Hardy Street, Nelson, wrote: “Will you kindly oblige me by making the following wireless communication for me to Dr Potaka of the Antarctic Party: Hope to see you brushing off the icicles soon. Hearty good wishes for Xmas and New Year. Jamiesons”. “Wally” of the Public Hospital of Nelson wrote: “How’s life amongst the ice and penguins? Dad has bought your car. All well at home. I am improving. The City of Sunshine awaits your return”; while Gertrude (Gertie) Batchelor of 2, Rossmore Terrace, Cashmere, Christchurch, sent at least four messages in 1934: in June and again in August she thanked Louis “for messages”; in October her message read: “Thanks for messages and flowers. Hope you are enjoying the novelty of activity by now. Our weather leaves much to be desired . Best wishes from all at Cashmere”, and on December 9,1934, she wrote: “Many thanks for beautiful present. Hope to see you in New Zealand next February. Best wishes for Christmas and the New Year from all at Cashmere”.

The only non-social message in the Dunedin file was one responding to “Surgeon L.H.Potaka’s” radiogram requesting assistance with the treatment of cows: Veterinary Surgeon Gomez of Richmond advised: “Exercise if possible. Spray fodder ...” etcetera.

None of Potaka’s professional notes while he was Byrd’s Medical Officer seemed to have survived, except one memo to the Admiral. It concerns Isaac Schlossbach (known as “Ike”; as Louis Potaka was to his family). A flyer of considerable experience, a great raconteur and one of the men universally popular in Little America, Ike Schlossbach is sitting on Potaka’s right in the photograph of the explorers watching movies, in the *National Geographic* of October, 1935 (p.417).

Potaka’s signed memo to the Admiral about Schlossbach was dated December 8, 1934, and read:

I have been unable to make an examination of Schlossbach’s eyesight since test charts have not yet been made for me. I beg to request you to refuse Schlossbach permission to pilot an aeroplane until I have made such an examination. Information, of which you are aware, supplied to me by the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery, Washington, D.C. disclosed that Schlossbach was suffering from blindness of the left eye, which disqualified him as an aviation pilot. The Fokker plane crashed last March

when piloted by Schlossbach, and I have not been satisfied that the crash was due not to faulty piloting directly attributable to his physical disability. If you allow Schlossbach permission to pilot a plane before I have examined him, please understand that I disclaim all responsibility for the consequences.

Clearly, the doctor was prudently stating his case. The crash of March, however, was probably not due to Ike's eyesight; (and Bob Young was one of the happy survivors). Had I questioned Charles Murphy of Vermont in 1985 specifically about Ike the pilot and Ike the doctor (Potaka), I would undoubtedly have more for this essay than I do; but my queries then were about the log of a vessel used in BAE1. Murphy wrote that after he'd helped Byrd with his books, he had returned all materials to the Admiral. I subsequently found, however, that Murphy had added a couple of footnotes to the Potaka story.

Addressing the New Zealand Antarctic Society in about 1983, and calling his talk "Some Vagrant Recollections of an Elderly Antarcticist", Murphy had taken the tale about Dr Baxter's medicine and a still a little further: "Our Maori physician invented a still", he told his audience, and "Dr Potaka ran Dr Baxter's Lung Preserver through it. But he never succeeded in ridding it of a tarry gummy residue. But he was never without a customer". And one can imagine Charlie winking...though whether Charlie was a customer is not clear. He claims, however, that he was a patient of Potaka. "The New Zealander, a fine physician, was part Maori. His bedside manner was hardly soothing though. I all but severed my forefinger one morning while chopping wood and I telephoned across the camp to say that I needed help to staunch the flow of blood. 'Bad luck', Dr Potaka acknowledged. 'Get the fire started. Heat up some water. Call me when it's boiling, and I'll come over'".

BAE2 Supply Officer Stevenson Corey of Massachusetts well remembers when he was a Potaka patient. And in 1996, in about his ninety-second year, he told the story for A & E's biography of Richard E. Byrd ("The Last Explorer"). The few seconds of Potaka in the video is extracted from about 24 seconds on the incident, in Reel 8, of the motion picture "DISCOVERY", the considerable wriggling and wrenching needed to remove Corey's tooth in the movie being omitted from the A & E video - as is Corey's obvious show of delight in Reel 8 of the movie when Potaka has finished the task. As he does when Dr Potaka operates on Pelter, Byrd in his 1938 movie neglects to mention Potaka by name when he is working on Corey's tooth. And most regrettably the commentary in the A & E biography omits to mention that the man at work on Corey was a doctor and that his name is Potaka. In response to a query from me, the writer, director and producer of the 1996 A & E biography, kindly sent me Corey's "full and original statement as transcribed" and suggested the blank spaces in it indicated that the transcriber couldn't understand the name Corey gave. Since they had not been sure of the name mentioned, they had apparently edited it out of the video. (And one wonders why they did not call Corey and ask him to clarify the name - or open a copy of DISCOVERY at p. 212).

Corey also recalls Potaka's interest while at Little America in a little bird-shooting

and a lot of box construction (“nailing them together, mostly at night”). When he was after the skua gulls on overcast days, Coery told us, Potaka would not wear sunglasses. (And we would insert here that photokeratitis – or snowblindness - is said to afflict people on overcast days as often as on sunny days). Potaka, according to Corey, was short and plump – though he seems not to be so plump in the clip from the film of BAE2 - and “an easy-going little fellow like me!”. Corey is a short man, but not that easy-going. “A strict Supply Officer, they called me ‘Little Caesar’”, he said, in Winchester MA, with a smile. (And one reads that Edward G. Robinson starred in the gangster movie “Little Caesar” released shortly before BAE2). But the medical supplies were beyond Corey’s control.

Those supplies did not include everything Dr Potaka wanted to assist the recovery of auto-giro pilot young Bill McCormick of Arizona, who wrote in 1990 that:

“I started my meteorological flights after the sun started coming back in September. After one flight I really wrecked it. I was lucky, simple fracture of the left arm, cuts, bruises also a couple of broken ribs. The doctor had the machine shop make up a Jones extension for the arm. Having no x-ray it was necessary for him to measure from a bone in the right shoulder to the elbow and then measure the left arm to make sure the distance was the same. There was always at least a five-pound pull through the elbow so that the upper bone would not telescope, he explained. I was flat on my back for six weeks. He saw me twice a day for the first two weeks, and then at least once a day from then on. I felt that I got to know him as well as and better than most of the men at Little America...Prior to my close association with him I just felt he was somewhat an introvert, very quiet, laid back but very pleasant. After six weeks my opinion was pretty much the same, but from our chats I found him to be very brilliant and very capable.”

In a second letter to me (in May, 1993, from Scottsdale, Arizona) McCormick remembered that “Potaka was always ready, willing and able to help everyone”.

The young McCormick long before the crash is front-row right in the movie-watching photograph, and McCormick recovering in the care of Dr Potaka and talking to America is alone in the photograph on page 454 of the *National Geographic* (1935). Perhaps one day I shall find out what he told them back home from Little America about Louis, whether prompted or not prompted by PR man Charles Murphy.

Young dog-team driver Olin Stancliff of Pennsylvania did not exchange many words with Potaka, as he recalls, but he was examined periodically and he was one of the four men (Corey was another) weighed in by the doctor after the 77- mile trail journey. “He was only about four foot six. And when our new doc arrived at Little America there were no clothes or boots small enough to fit him!”

Biologist Alton Lindsey was kind enough to give me a copy of his lengthy diary of

BAE2 and of his 1983 book *Naturalist on Watch* and to welcome me to their home in West Lafayette – and to spend many hours checking drafts of our interview for the polar history journal FRAM. The doctor had pulled a tooth for him, and had on June 21 examined “his mid-winter condition”. Potaka had been “the attending physician” when a dog had given birth to five pups in one of the huts. A dog-lover, Potaka did not hesitate to shoot birds, whether for scientific purposes or for pleasure – the skua gulls were at risk when the doctor was outside with his .22 rifle. In his journal, abstainer Lindsey noted that Potaka “doled out 2 ozs. of 100% - proof medicinal brandy per man on The Glorious Fourth”. Another entry records that there was a “big political convention in the Doctor’s office, where opinions and alcoholic stimulation were equally fluent”, that lasted till 3 am. Alton Lindsey never forgot that it was Dr Potaka who had told Paul Siple (Lindsey’s lifelong friend) when he treated Al Wade’s face for frostbite on his return from the long trail journey that no one understood either the physics or the physiology of frostbite. Paul, according to Lindsey, had commented “Then someone should certainly find out” (*Naturalist on Watch*, p.158); and after writing his 1931 doctoral thesis for Clark University (*Adaptations of the Explorer to the Climate of Antarctica*), Dr Paul Siple and Charles Passel worked at Little America in 1940 on the specifics of the “wind chill factor”. Incidentally, Siple had attempted to get Dr Potaka’s advice about relieving the pain and swelling that Wade was experiencing on the trail, but the radio message to BAE2’s base did not get through.

And it was answers that I neglected to get from Bob Young before his death in Auckland in 1966 – answers about the whereabouts of his own diary of BAE2 and answers about Dr Potaka on the Ice. In a narrative said to be based on his diary, Young noted for January 6, 1935: “The doctor and another dog-driver snowblind”. And the entry for January 24 reads: “The doctor is quite worried about his eyes – they are not getting well. While he was delirious in the first stages of snowblindness, he asked different ones to put one or two drops of cocaine in, to stop the pain. Now, he thinks he has ruined his eyes with too much cocaine. We all tell him they will get better in time (they certainly did look bulgy and milky”.

While cocaine certainly had anesthetic properties and was sold at that period, and in the decades prior to then, as a medicine to lessen pain – of earache and the pain of toothache, for instance - and drops might do the same in the case of snowblindness, time was (and is) the only healer of that affliction, and usually two or at most three days is sufficient time. Potaka’s eyes had not recovered after some 18 days. Had Potaka seriously damaged his eyes by over-doing the cocaine drops? He thought so. Were what Bob Young described as “bulgy and milky” the symptoms of a condition more serious than intense snowblindness? One ophthalmologist I quizzed had no doubt that was the case. But as I observed earlier, an ophthalmologist would require more information than we have to answer these questions with certainty. However, one understands that “bulgy and milky” point to damage of the “skin over the eye”; and repeated use of cocaine is said to inhibit corneal healing. What is certain is that there was no other doctor, yet alone an ophthalmologist, around to examine Dr Potaka’s eyes!

Later, in a February 1937 letter, Bob Young was to recall another conversation he had

with Potaka – as we shall note in a later section of this essay.

Radioman Jim Sissoons , another New Zealander with BAE2, providing information for L.B. Quartermain to include in his book on New Zealanders involved in the Antarctic, wrote that Potaka was “immensely popular with the Yankee boys during the winter on the ice...he was a fine little fellow”.(Quartermain Files, Canterbury Museum, Christchurch).

And the fine little fellow with his fellow explorers returned to New Zealand in February, 1935. Ivor Tinglof was one of those who arrived on the *Ruppert* with Potaka on February 18 – and one wonders as one looks at the photograph on page 79 in *Last Port of Call to Antarctica* (by Ian Church ,1996, Otago Heritage Books) of the *Ruppert* moving toward the dock in Dunedin whether Potaka and Tinglof are amongst the group of men on deck. Ivor had been the man who had prevented a catastrophe when there had been a fire as they were preparing to operate nearly a year earlier - and also the fellow who Poulter had noted in his diary had required the doctor’s attention when he was got stewed. He had been ailing for a while and his condition on the trip north had not been good; but it seems that a viral infection struck in Dunedin and he died on March 6. A funeral service was held on March 7 and his body was cremated on March 8 at Andersons Bay. By which time, it seems very likely, Dr Potaka had concluded his service with BAE2. Louis did not accompany BAE2 explorers to the United States; but presumably, sooner rather than later, made his way back to Nelson, perhaps via Christchurch.

Before that, however, Potaka received some attention from the New Zealand press. And *The Evening Star* in Dunedin published a piece on February 19, 1935, under the heading “Medico’s Sinecure...Looking after Fit Men...Dr Potaka’s Experiences on Ice”. Noting that Admiral Byrd said that “Dr Potaka was superb...that Pelter is alive today is a credit to the doctor”, the report stated that “Dr Potaka’s opinions of his year’s stay on the ice barrier are mixed”. It reads:

“I am glad to get back, but I would not say I have not enjoyed the experience”, said Dr Potaka. From the medical viewpoint, his work was a sinecure, as there was very little to do. When one had a crowd of fit men as likely patients, one did not expect much illness, and the health of the men had been good throughout. “I do not know of any self-respecting germ which would live down there “, laughingly replied the doctor, in declining to discuss the bacteriology found at Little America...Considerable prominence was given in the American papers to the attacks of colds, but he attached no significance whatever to that ailment. He personally had several colds, with a sore throat and a cough, but none was serious. The health of the men was excellent.

Dr Potaka was dubbed ‘the original excavator’, as his spare time hobby was to go digging in the snow and ice for material left behind by the first Byrd expedition. Life, he said, could be quite interesting in the Antarctic as there was plenty of diversion. The main thing was to guard oneself

against oneself.

The Antarctic was vastly different from what he had expected after reading all the books dealing with the continent. It was impossible to get a right perception of the continent unless one lived there. "But such places are alright only for a short time", the doctor said. "There is only ice and snow. Little America was like a city I visited one hunt where fifteen men were located only twelve times during the year. To live there was like living in a city".

Much in the above report calls for comment, but I will restrict myself to observing that the biologists found far more than ice and snow - and the good doctor was forgetting the skua gulls - and he is hinting, perhaps, that some companions did not do a good job of "guarding oneself against oneself". Would that one could locate the reporter's notes of that interview! Was there a question about snowblindness? How did he treat the men who were "laid up" with snowblindness? Was Potaka asked about cases of snowblindness that lingered, for more than the normal 48 hours? Probably not. But surely he would have been asked about the Admiral's health after his sojourn at Advanced Base? And also what he, Dr Potaka, now intended to do. Was he going to visit family in Wanganui? And one wonders whether that reporter was young Jim Caffin.

If Dr Potaka ever gave talks about BAE2 - and it is not unlikely that Maori communities and perhaps medical groups would have invited him to speak to them - we have no record; but it would certainly be instructive to see what else he had to say. Especially about his own health while down South. Neither do we know that he wrote about his experiences, though he came close to doing so - as this letter to a friend Ferris Prowse in Murchison indicates.

Dear Ferris,

Thanks for your letter. This one has to go to the United States before being returned to New Zealand so there is no sense in my writing you at length as I shall see you long before I get it. However, someone may be interested in the stamps.

Best Wishes.

L.H.Potaka

The letter from Prowse was one of the two that had arrived by boat at Little America in January, 1935; and Potaka's response was cancelled on January 30, 1935, at the special U.S Post Office, Little America, Antarctica. As also was this one, to a lady in Christchurch who had sent him a present.

Dear Miss Williams,

I am only too pleased to comply with your request for a stamp and envelope. Thanks so much for the cigarettes. I am a non-smoker but they were greatly appreciated by my friends.



I hope that this note is returned safely to you from the United States.

Kind Regards  
Yours Sincerely  
L.H.Potaka

Did Dr Potaka return from the Antarctic bearing gifts – including unearthed (or un-iced) souvenirs of BAE1, carefully packed in many boxes - for family and friends? When did he part from his shipmates and leave Dunedin? And where did he go? Did he have his eyes examined? Or did he intentionally avoid having his eyes examined? What did he hope to do in the immediate future? Some trout fishing, very probably; but what about his medical career? Was the news that Dr F. Hudson the Medical Superintendent in Nelson, after six years in that position, had resigned in early January disappointing? Did he know his successor Dr Percy C. Brunette (previously at Whangarei Hospital)?

All we are certain about is that following his Antarctic Experience, which he seems to have enjoyed and during which he earned the respect of more than fifty men, from many walks of life, who had chosen to rough it on the Ice, Louis Potaka was shortly to begin a new life in Takaka. There would be good times and some joy no doubt, but the little doctor's life would become increasingly complicated and stressful - and ultimately unbearable.

## 5: *Locum Tenens in Takaka*

Admiral Richard E. Byrd, leader of BAE2 and safely back in New Zealand with all the 55 men of his Winter Party, was at the top of every list of desirable speakers. And the Admiral doubtless felt a duty to repay the assistance and support that the government and businesses and individuals had always given him. He was, however, not yet fully fit. And he declined offers to attend major functions – such as a reception and dance suggested by the New Zealand Antarctic Society (whose Chairman then expressed the fervent hope that he would at least have “an opportunity of grasping the admiral’s hand” before he left the country). But he did, during the three weeks before he and Mrs Byrd left on the *Rangitiki* from Wellington on March 15, travel, in his own words, the “length and breadth” of the country, receiving the congratulations of New Zealanders and saying a few words about BAE2. And he praised Dr Potaka - from Dunedin northwards he proclaimed that “Dr Potaka has been a wonderful success” (and probably more than a few local newspapers reported his comment).

What Louis was doing in the days following February 19, 1935, we do not know. At some point he gave four puppies to members of the expedition (only one of which arrived in Boston). And we know he did not continue on to the United States on the *Ruppert* or the *Bear* (both of which left New Zealand on March 13) with his fellow explorers and thus was absent (as were four other members of the Ice Party) when the *Bear* steamed up the Potomac and the explorers met President Franklin D. Roosevelt on May 10, 1935. There is, in fact, a period of some four months about which, for the most part, we can only speculate.

While a visit to Wanganui and his mother and siblings might have occurred, I’m inclined to believe that he telephoned Esther – and possibly Aunt Ada in Utiku – and made no promises about when he might get to the North Island. There was probably an invitation from pharmacist H.F. West to stay with him in Nelson - probably extended even before he had left for the Antarctic in 1934 – and to bring his many boxes and collie dogs with him. And in early March he left Dunedin; and en route north, he more than likely visited the Batchelors in Christchurch. And then from the familiar base at the Wests, Potaka very likely did a lot of fishing (may even have gone to Lake Rotoroa), played a little golf, renewed brotherly contacts with his fellow freemasons and discussed his professional future with retiring Medical Superintendent Dr Hudson and possibly with the incoming MS, Dr Percy Brunette (who took over in Nelson in early April, 1935). He doubtless called on the Jamiesons and Dr Low (but avoided discussing any problems he was having with his eyes); and he may also at this time have talked to Oriwa Haddon, an ordained Methodist minister and a Labour Party supporter, and - much later - organizing secretary of the Labour Party’s Maori Advisory Council. And then Louis became aware that Dr Edward Coventry Bydder in Takaka (whom he had known at university in the twenties) was looking for a locum tenens, decided that that might be an appropriate next step, met and discussed with Bydder the arrangements Dr Bydder had in mind...and started as Bydder’s stand-in about June, 1935...having, according to Dr Bydder, as

reported much later in the minutes of the May 23, 1936, meeting of the Nelson Division of the BMA, twice promised Bydder that he (Potaka) would not set up in opposition in Takaka (an undertaking that Sister Hyland confirmed in writing and Dr W.B.Andrew confirmed verbally at the May Nelson meeting).

An alternative to that scenario is one that envisages Louis leaving Dunedin very shortly after the death and funeral service of expedition member Ivor Tinglof on March 7 and travelling to the North Island (with very brief stops in Christchurch and Nelson). From Bignell Street, Wanganui, he goes north to pay his respects to his father and grandparents in Rata Cemetery. And while staying on the family farm or with Aunt Ada in Utiku, he goes fishing in a few of the familiar streams with Uncle Wilson and accepts an invitation to visit Wanganui Collegiate to tell the boys about the Antarctic. Beginning to run short of funds, and without any immediate job prospects, Louis then starts networking with his contacts in South Island - and is advised to grab whatever job is on offer, even a locum tenens for a few months. And he's told that Dr Bydder in Takaka is said to be making plans to be out of the country for some time and that there might be a temporary position there. They meet...and Potaka allegedly makes the promise alluded to in the previous paragraph.

About June, 1935, Dr Potaka begins work in Takaka as Dr Bydder's locum tenens; and on the recommendation of Dr Bydder he will also be the Native Medical Officer (NMO), receiving a small subsidy for caring for the "several families of indigent natives in the district". He has gone to Takaka voluntarily and in good faith. And presumably not expecting things to go wrong, drastically wrong. But he might have known that in addition to coping with the after-effects of his extended snowblindness (and any lingering eye damage, caused by excessive use of cocaine drops), his time in Takaka would be one of considerable tension and stress.

Louis would have known that at the national level the role of the State in the availability and delivery of health services had been discussed for at least twenty years – at Otago he would very probably have heard lectures about a 'National Medical Service'; and perhaps 'Spud' from the North Island had participated in student debates on the issue. And Louis would have known that the New Zealand Labour Party was advocating a national health insurance scheme that would support a national medical service. That there was considerable opposition to 'State Medicine' in the medical profession would also be known to Dr Potaka, though he might not have known that during his absence down South the level of alarm and despondency in the profession had risen. But we can imagine that during the four months after his return, between fishing trips, he soon caught up with what was being written in the New Zealand Medical Journal and discussed by the British Medical Association about social security schemes. And he read that the doctors' professional organisation had established a National Health Insurance Committee (with one of his former Otago professors – Charles Hercus – as its Convenor, and Dr D.C.Low of Nelson one of its members). And then, at about the time he was due to start in Takaka, he heard that one of the general practitioners in Nelson that he knew well, Dr James Jamieson, had been elected permanent chairman of the committee. Of course, Louis Potaka had no way of knowing, although it was widely predicted, that the Labour Party in

the country would win the election in November, 1935. But he would have realised that if a Labour Government were elected, 'Jamie' and the profession generally would feel that the future livelihood of the private practitioner would be at stake. And the fight would be on. And Golden Bay would be a battleground, as much as anywhere else.

The Golden Bay area in the thirties had no more than about 3,500 inhabitants but many of them were industrial workers - employed in the Onekaka Iron and Steel Works (until it went into liquidation), the Golden Bay Cement Company, the Public Works Department and on the first stages of the Cobb River Hydro Scheme, or were unemployed. They formed the nucleus of the Labour Party and the Union movements in the area which pushed for a Party or Union Medical Scheme with salaried or contracted medical service. And although the Conservatives retained power in the area after the November, 1935, election, major issues were being settled in Wellington; and, wrote one informant, "Labour supporters locally were pretty gung ho and the conservatives felt sorely threatened". Political affiliation was the primary dividing agent in the community but, it was also suggested, the strong feelings were "given some thrust from traditional resentments in that the Irish/Catholic community was very strongly identified with Labour, as, indeed, were the Maori voters"

And into Takaka went Dr Potaka, "anointed by his Antarctic experience, blessed by the regional medical authority in Nelson, and welcomed by the local Labour Party organisation". His presence, we were told, "polarized personal loyalties...and everyone got classified as being either pro- or anti- Potaka ...and the valley really buzzed with the fury of it all". But, it seems, there was more to the unpleasant situation in the area than politics. And more that Louis would surely have been aware of before making the move to Takaka.

Dr Bydder had earlier on decided that Union and Labour Party policies concerning health care posed a serious threat - an "attempt to run private medical practice and himself out of town". And his set-up in Takaka included the local Maternity Hospital. After purchasing the hospital, he had fired Matron Nurse Bethune. And there then had followed a legal case - 'Bydder vs Bethune' (which, we are told, went through the Magistrate's, Supreme and Appeal Courts - but about which we have no information). The ousted Nurse Bethune was obviously no friend of Dr Bydder - or of Sister Lynda Hyland.

Sister Hyland, some ten years Potaka's senior and with about twenty years experience in the nursing profession, had been installed by Bydder as the new Matron in his hospital, in which, we were told, she actually had a financial stake; and she evidently enjoyed the trust of her employer. So much so, that when Dr Ed Bydder left his practice in the hands of Dr Louis Potaka, locum tenens, Sister Lynda Hyland was given power of attorney. And while such an arrangement was probably necessary and natural and would surely have been known by Louis before accepting the position in Takaka, it did, it seems, set the stage for some unseemly conflict.

How far, one wonders, had the boat carrying Dr Bydder to England from New

Zealand got before Potaka realised that Sister Hyland intended to exercise her authority in ways that would, it seems, aggravate him? (Potaka was later to say “He left a dreadful woman here as nurse and there was trouble from the outset”). And how much of the clash was due to Sister Hyland “being”, as was alleged in a letter to us, “a very bossy person who didn’t like being told what to do by a Maori doctor”? And how much was due to her being “confident and assertive” and her dedication to a professional “management routine” – and Louis, perhaps, feeling that his status as a medical doctor (although he had relatively little experience in general practice) was not properly respected by this older person? (And one dares to speculate that the dedicated Sister Hyland, who had lost her fiancé during WW1, reminded him, perhaps, of a dominant/demanding mother!). And how long was it before the locum tenens realised that Hyland was “instructed” (by Bydder) “to report on medical matters and pressures on the hospital to him, either directly or through Dr W.B.Andrew in Collingwood”? (Dr Andrew, then in practice in Collingwood, often gave anaesthetics for Bydder, and was “keeping an eye on the practice” – and, he later said, he had been assured in a telephone conversation with Potaka, four months after Bydder’s departure, that Louis did not intend to stay in Takaka...”his intention was to go to America” ). And when did word first reach Dr Bydder - “busy in England getting involved in orthopedics and some areas where radiology was relevant” - that all was not well back in Golden Bay? And what information was he sent about Potaka’s professional or unprofessional approach and activities? And was it by cable that, probably in late December, 1935, Dr Bydder was advised that “the medical practice was in danger of disintegrating” (and with it the valuable “goodwill”? Or, to put it in Dr Edward Bydder’s words as reported in the May 23, 1936 minutes: “the financial aspect of the practice was down to vanishing point...and his method of running the practice was totally different to instructions”. And how and when did another person close to Bydder communicate to Bydder that if he didn’t soon get back “there would be no practice left”?

We can be sure, I think, that Dr Bydder was disturbed by what he was being told, and that he did arrive back in Takaka “unannounced and unexpectedly” (at least as far as Potaka was concerned - Potaka was to say he “sneaked back”). But whether Bydder then found that his locum tenens, charged with looking after patients and maintaining the integrity of his practice, was in fact “working part of each week for himself”, and/or spending much time fishing, and/or lax about keeping appointments with patients, and using his car for personal activities (including to curry favour with prospective patients), and/or that a personality clash between Potaka and the older and very experienced Hyland - or the Labour versus National Party conflict – had driven patients away from his surgery, we are not so sure.

One who recalls those days writes of a “state of dissension between Dr Potaka and Sister Hyland” (while, he says, Dr Bydder was “away in Britain and Italy on a study tour”). He also, however, provides evidence that they did sometimes work together:

“I may be able to help a little as I was operated on by Dr Potaka in 1935 at Dr Bydder’s hospital theatre in Commercial Street, Takaka. I will never forget the experience as the surgeon (Dr Potaka) and his assistants, Sister Linda Hyland, Nurse

Helen Winter and housemaid Sylvia Polglase, were all part of the team. My problem was an abscess in my right groin which had to be lanced. When the Dr announced that he was ready to begin, the Sister put pressure on my right arm and side while Helen Winter did the same on the left. Sylvia was placed between and held my legs. Dr Potaka sprayed what would have been an antiseptic around the area and proceeded to lance the abscess. My reaction was violent in an attempt to be rid of the excruciating pain, but I was held fast by the team until the moment had passed. I remained in the hospital, which was owned by Dr Bydder, for a few days for aftercare....”

And a lady who was in her twenties in the 1930s indicates that life for Louis was not all work and stress:

“I knew Louis when he was at the Nelson Hospital before the Byrd expedition. The acquaintance was then just a smile. Later, when he returned to be the locum at Takaka – that is when we became working friends. If I was at golf, he would collect me for a dash back to Hillcrest - a small private hospital where his patients came for treatment and rest where I was on the staff- for duty at 9 pm. Sunday evening if he called and I was going to church he would come with me. Supper - his favourite was coffee made with milk and a dust of cinnamon, and sardines on toast to follow. Yes, he was quite fond of music, and he enjoyed coming with me into the church choir. A kind smiling face...”

And we doubt that Dr Bydder was smiling when he returned. Whatever it was he found there, and/or believed to have been happening in his absence, it is hard to accept that that his reaction would have been violent – but it seems likely that he was more aggressive than is suggested by one of my informant’s succinct comment – that “he saw fit to terminate the locum tenens arrangement with Dr Potaka”. Potaka’s claim (to a Nelson Division of the BMA sub-committee on May 28, 1936 - to attend which and give his “version” of events he had been given one week) was that when they met “he refused to hear my explanation of affairs...gave me two hours’ notice and threatened to prevent me taking a locum elsewhere in New Zealand”. Furthermore, he asserted, Bydder and Hyland had been “verbally abusive...both yelling at me...and saying they would put my things out”. We do not have evidence from witnesses, but it seems more than likely that the exchanges at the reunion of principal and locum were acrimonious rather than harmonious.

What their initial agreement stipulated we don’t know (it may never have been put in writing), but when the axe fell Potaka felt he was owed certain monies - and Bydder expected Potaka would follow the profession’s ethical rules and leave the district to practice elsewhere. That Louis would depart the scene.

It appears, however, that there were many - patients and supporters and those who disliked Sister Hyland, as well as some with a (Labour and Union) political agenda – who wanted Dr Potaka to stay in Takaka. And stay he did.

## ***6: General Practitioner in Takaka***

That Louis remained in Takaka (and did not go to America) and started his own practice there - “put up his own plate” - is not in doubt: he was advertising in the *Golden Bay Times* and treating patients, etc (and he is quoted in the BMA minutes of 28 May, 1936, as stating: “I do not dispute setting up practice in Takaka”). What is less obvious is why he did so. We are not much concerned with his breaking any promises not to stay – promises, in any case, that he denies making, in those minutes. But rather with his rationale for doing so, given that he knew – as every general practitioner knew – that the BMA considered it unethical for a locum tenens to open up in the area he had just been working in. And we again quote Louis from the 28 May minutes, this time responding to a question: “Yes. I am acquainted with the passage in the Medical Handbook stating that it is a dishonorable thing to commence practice in a district where one has recently been a locum – and in opposition to the principal”. We would not expect educated Louis to tell the BMA, politely or otherwise, that he was “above the law”. What, then, was the argument Dr Potaka put forth, in his defence?

Louis’ argument, as I understand it, was that the rule applied in “normal circumstances” and that in his case the circumstances were not “normal”. Dr Bydder’s treatment of him made them abnormal, and he was thus absolved from any obligation to follow the rule.

To me, this does not sound persuasive/compelling. Indeed, the conclusion (“thus...”) seems dubious, to say the least. But we record the ways in which Potaka claimed Bydder had “behaved abnormally” toward him.

Louis cited four specific points, against Bydder: “his giving me no notice of his return”; “his giving me two hours in which to leave the place”; “his refusal to hear any explanation of affairs or of my side of the question”; and “his threat to prevent me taking a locum tenens elsewhere in New Zealand”.

Potaka either really believed that Bydder’s treatment of him would absolve him from any obligation to follow the rule (was there provision for that in the Handbook? The answer to that I cannot provide – since not even the National Library in Wellington has been able to track down such a publication); OR that public opinion – local support – would be strong enough to persuade the authorities (in Wellington) to make an exception to the rule in his case: his supporters would point to his record and the need for an alternative/additional doctor in Takaka.

If Louis were counseled on his situation and his arguments, no information has come to hand; but there is some evidence that that he was encouraged to stay and put up his plate.

The ‘anti-Hyland-ites’ and the ‘anti-Bydder-ites’ (and there were very few of the

latter in the district until early 1936) or the ‘pro-Potaka-ites’ formed a Medical Association and bought a house for him, the ousted Nurse Bethune leased a large property nearby as a nursing home for Louis’ patients, and Wallace Page bought a new Dodge car for him to use.

We imagine that these benefits were discussed/promised before the Doctor made his decision and then delivered after he’d decided to practice in Takaka. They would surely have been factored in to the decision-making - as would have his assessment of his prospects for attracting patients and generating revenues (to live on, and pay the overheads - as well as the interest to creditors who advanced any loans he might need). Would Louis have easily dealt with such financial considerations? Was he business-minded? Or would he have been seriously anxious about the figures, worrying in the night whether if he opened his own practice in Takaka he would succeed financially? We know that within a month or so of starting his practice he was assuring Admiral Byrd that he would do “very well”, but he was also admitting that the first year was not going to be easy.

Presumably Louis he did not count on continuing as NMO – and receiving the small quarterly subsidy - once Dr Bydder returned, even though, as he probably became aware, a petition to the Minister of Native Affairs for him to do so was presented at the end of March, 1936. This petition, signed by or on behalf of 41 Maori - including five infants and several persons with the same surname – the authorities were not inclined to reject immediately, despite being advised that any transfer to Potaka would be an injustice to Dr Bydder and worrying that Bydder, if Potaka became the NMO, might be reluctant to again take-over should Potaka (an “unknown quantity”) not remain in Takaka. Indeed, drawing again on Dr Dow’s notes on archival correspondence, in July the opinion was expressed that: “It is not unreasonable to allow the Maoris to have the Medical Officer of their choice provided continuity of service can be guaranteed”. In any case, the small subsidy the NMO for Takaka received seems hardly significant.

Non-economic factors that might have been listed by Potaka as he pondered whether to start his own practice in Takaka might have included under the heading ‘Positives’ (that is, in favour of staying in Takaka): local friends; local scenery; potential for breeding dogs, ... Under ‘Negatives’, he might well have noted Sister Lynda Hyland – and perhaps the difficulty of coping with less than perfect vision.

Potaka claimed on more than one occasion (before his peers) that Bydder’s treatment of him on his return from overseas left him “no alternative” but to start his own practice in Takaka; but, of course, he could have moved away. And with hindsight, we can say that Dr Potaka’s decision to practice in Takaka – perhaps the penultimate major decision of his life – was a bad one. And one, I don’t doubt, that gave some considerable concern to his friends in Nelson (especially H.F. West) and his professional acquaintances there (especially Dr Jamieson – would the blunt Shetlander have told Louis that he was being manipulated and likely to get into trouble?). And what would Professor Hercus have advised had he been consulted? Would he have warned of ‘political agendas’? And what about Potaka’s erstwhile leader in the Antarctic?



But Louis Potaka had not been in touch with the Admiral during 1935, though Byrd (anxious as always to retain the friendship and have the approval of the men he led) had, in July, 1935, encouraged Potaka to correspond. From Boston, he wrote:

My dear Doctor,

I hope you will keep in touch with me because I don't want to lose track of you. I have had tremendous details to handle since my return which has kept me pretty well to the grindstone so I have not been able to write as much as I would have liked to. However, I will never lack the time to keep in contact with you.

I have tried to keep track of your doings by making enquiries from time to time but without success. Please inform me of any change of address.

All good luck and best wishes.  
Very sincerely yours,

Another letter in 1935 (October 19) to Potaka in Nelson that also went unanswered was a request from the New York City office that he ship to BAE2 headquarters the First Aid Medical Kits that he was said ('by three or four responsible members of the expedition") to have taken ashore in New Zealand: the people who had furnished them for BAE2 (Burroughs Wellcome & Co) "wanted them for their exhibit rooms".

When Louis did finally respond to Admiral Byrd's July, 1935, letter, he merely mentioned the letter from an assistant in New York City, but he had many other things to tell Byrd. Omitting for the moment the fifth and sixth paragraphs of his letter, dated April 30, 1936, Dr Potaka, giving his address as Box 42, Takaka, wrote:

Dear Admiral Byrd,

Please forgive me for not having written sooner. I received your Christmas card and your letter for which many thanks. I hope that Mrs. Byrd and your family and yourself are all well and that you are not attempting to overdo things.

When we arrived back in New Zealand my eyes gave me a great deal of concern and annoyance. They still annoy me a great deal but I am getting used to them now. It is only the annoyance, the sight not being affected.

Well, I have had an interesting time here and finally have settled here having put my own plate up. I shall do very well here but the first year is going to be the hardest. I shall have a practice worth at least \$10,000 per annum.

I did a locum for another doctor here for nine months but he left a dreadful woman here as Nurse and gave her the power of attorney. There was trouble from the outset and finally he put the cap on everything by sneaking back into Takaka. I had no alternative but to put my own plate up.

I am sorry I did not see more of you before you left New Zealand but as I said before my eyes were troubling me greatly. I had intended coming to the United States before the end of the year, but fate decided otherwise. I must come within the next few years and renew old acquaintances.

So far I have not taken up my correspondence with the other members of the expedition properly but now that I am my own boss and in a better frame of mind I shall be able to do my duty in that direction.

Did you get the collie puppy that went back on the Jacob Ruppert? I shall be able to breed collies extensively here and have four bitch puppies which means that in a years time I shall have five brood bitches. Pelter, Sterrett and Black had a puppy each but I have had no word of them as yet.

Takaka is a beautiful place, one of if not the best tourist resort in New Zealand.”

Potaka then tells Byrd that he has been interrupted to interview patients. And much of the rest of the letter suggests he is adding items between interviews. He continues:

“Despite having to work in temporary rooms whilst proper rooms are being prepared I have done very well indeed for the five weeks I have been practicing on my own account.

We have had very good weather over Easter and it has been very pleasant since. I had better not say anything further about the weather for this very minute it has commenced to rain.

It is a nuisance to have to work under makeshift conditions but my rooms will be ready in less than three weeks time. I could not go past local talent to do the work for me and as a consequence there have been unnecessary delays

No doubt you have been extremely busy since your return to America. I have had little word of the Expedition members except for a few words from Mac and a couple of letters from Quin. I hope that you can give me some information of the various members.

I am not at all proficient with a typewriter as you may see but must practice.

I must enquire in Dunedin to see whether anything has been done about Tinglof's grave and if not do something about it. I have had no chance to get away from this place for a year so have not been near Dunedin."

Louis then tells Byrd that the trout season is closing (though he "did not get out except for three days during the past season and then had only one decent morning" when he landed "fifteen trout between two and four pounds") and the shooting season is opening (he would "attempt to knock over some quail very soon", which were "even more plentiful than last season"). Then he turns to archaeology, writing that: "Archaeologically this place is extremely interesting and already I have much of interest. Later on I shall surely send you something of great interest". Moa bones were to be found "in great quantities" and if he were "fortunate to secure a complete skeleton" he would save it for Byrd. There was a great deal of limestone and some very fine caves in the area, and many holes "in the limestone to be investigated", Louis hoped "to find something exquisite in the way of caves". And his letter concludes with:

"Well, enough about myself. I hope you will write and tell me something of your activities. I have to go out to visit a case some seventeen miles away so shall conclude this note ...

With the kindest regards,  
Yours sincerely,  
Louis Hauti Potaka"

The letter provides a glimpse of Louis' life and situation in April, 1936, and the Admiral was doubtless pleased to receive it. I see him skimming through it in his office in the Byrd home in Brimmer Street in Beacon Hill, Boston, but returning with a frown and some agitation to paragraphs five and six, which read:

"If your financial position allows of it I hope that you can back me to the extent of 500 pounds. My position will be perfectly safe and you will merely have to arrange so that the Bank of New Zealand in Takaka will allow me to work on an overdraft up to 500 pounds. I am sorry to have to ask you and there would be no necessity to do so if the Dr here paid me 446 pounds and two shillings that he owes for wages and expenses. I shall sue for it but it will be held up till the end of June.

I shall try to make other arrangements in the meantime but in the case of necessity I hope that you will be able to assist me. Please indicate whether you can help or otherwise, then if you can do so I can cable you if needs be must."

Byrd scrawled on Louis' letter: "Say I am away & will answer when I return. Will write letter when I get back". And on June 6 his secretary duly wrote Potaka, acknowledging his letter and saying that "The Admiral will write you as soon as he returns here, regarding the various matters which you have brought up".

Of course, there was only one matter of real significance. And it must have crossed Byrd's mind that he might well receive a cable from Takaka before any letter he might write and send had time to reach Potaka.

And, sure enough, some two months after penning his April 30<sup>th</sup> letter to Byrd (and not having received a reply), on June 26 Potaka cabled Byrd at West Tremont in Maine:

URGENTLY NEED 300 POUNDS BACKING THROUGH BANK NEW  
ZEALAND TAKAKA SAFE PROSPECTS EXCELLENT KINDEST  
REGARDS SELF AND FAMILY

It reached Byrd in Bar Harbour, via Boston. The sum mentioned was substantially less than in the letter. It would be 'Safe'. On June 30 Byrd's cable back to Potaka read:

REGRET INABILITY TO SUPPLY FUNDS  
LETTER FOLLOWS REGARDS

Was Louis surprised by Byrd's negative response? Had he sensed that five hundred pounds might be too much? Would "three hundred pounds backing" have significantly eased his financial situation in July? Was he depending on Byrd to get him out of a jam? Did the Admiral's "inability" seriously impact on Potaka's state of mind? Did it cross his mind that Byrd seemed to have misunderstood what he was asking for? Whatever the answers to these questions may be, we have found no evidence that Louis contacted the Admiral again to clarify his request or explain just how urgent his need was. Perhaps he decided to await Byrd's promised letter before deciding whether to make a further appeal.

And Byrd's letter from Maine, dated 29 June, and mailed presumably within a day or two, reached Takaka about the end of July. And its very first sentence seems to me to suggest that Byrd thought he was being asked to lend Potaka the money. He wrote:

My dear Dr. Potaka,

I have just received your cable stating that you have urgent need for three hundred pounds. Here is my situation. I have approximately five hundred veterans of my four polar expeditions, in addition to about four hundred veterans of the World War who were with me on a couple of aviation stations during the war. Some of these fellows and many of the members of my expeditions have done inestimable things for my undertakings and I am deeply indebted to them.

A great majority of these fellows are volunteers who served without pay

for a period of approximately two years.

After my expeditions, if I come out without too big a deficit, I do all I can for my men financially; that is those who volunteered their services.

And Louis at this point must have wondered whether the fee he had requested in February, 1934, and received, for his services with BAE2 would be Byrd's reason for rejecting his 1936 request for financial backing. I imagine him called away to see a patient, before having a chance to read more of the Admiral's letter, and he knows there is much more to come. It continues, in part, with:

I generally make up my big deficits by working, such as lecturing ...and have often shared a big percentage of all I make with my men. But I have found, that to be absolutely square, I have to do as much for one man as for another. If I should lend one \$1500, then I would have to do the same thing for all the rest of the men. You can readily see that I could not possibly do this. Especially would this be the case if I should do this for one of the men who got a salary. I would lose the friendship of every volunteer if I did not do the same thing for him...

I have taken the trouble to explain all of this to you because I want you to understand the situation and realize I would like very much to do this for you if I could ...my friendly letter of explanation will show that I am interested in your welfare and would like to do what I can for you.

And then come a couple of paragraphs that refer to matters between Potaka and Byrd upon which, unfortunately, we can shed no light. Byrd scholars will recognise here another instance of the hypersensitive Byrd showing his desire to be held in high regard by his men; those interested in Potaka can only wonder what Potaka and Byrd argued about and whether there was bitterness between Potaka and the Admiral.

I have not been able to avoid the feeling that you have been dissatisfied with your experience, because I have heard from every man of the expedition but yourself and I have written you a number of friendly letters. It seems such a great pity for men to endure these expeditions together and to return harboring misunderstandings. Many polar expeditions have been spoiled by the bitterness engendered among its members. When I returned to New Zealand I chose to forget the arguments you and I had and went to a good deal of trouble to praise you throughout the length and breadth of your country. I have never been able to entirely forget the remark you made when this was called to your attention, but I have been able to overlook it.

If my declining to do as you request does not offend you, or if your long

silence does not mean that you are disgruntled with me, then I would like a friendly letter from you.

I have endeavored to extend the hand of friendship to you, after leaving New Zealand, in my lectures and in my articles, books, etc. And in spite of my very large debt, when I reached New Zealand, I fulfilled my contract with you to the letter.

With kind regards,  
Sincerely yours.

The 'Very sincerely yours' used by Byrd on July 30 had become 'Sincerely yours'. Did Potaka notice the chillier salutation? Did this - and the tone of the letter- put an end to any hope that Byrd might reconsider, especially if it were explained that it was only 'backing' for an overdraft that Potaka was seeking? Did Byrd wonder whether he would get the friendly letter he hoped for? Did Louis write and send one?

We know that, in the New Zealand winter of 1936, Dr Potaka was busy with patients "at the back of Mr Colin Scott's Pharmacy in Commercial Street, Takaka, and stayed with Mr and Mrs Davey Mason" (or was "his surgery in the office area of the Star Garage in Commercial Street"?). We know also that Dr Bydder's letter "reporting unethical conduct on the part of Dr L.H.Potaka" had been received by the Nelson Division of the BMA (and had generated discussion - mostly "in committee") and had led to a Sub-Committee Meeting on 28 May, 1936, to which Potaka had been "called" to give his "version" of events. Both Dr Bydder and Dr Potaka were in attendance on 28 May, Potaka presenting his four-point defence, and more - at the conclusion of which, the secretary had been instructed to draw up a statement to submit to the Ethical Committee. Furthermore, we know that at the Nelson Division meeting on June 6, 1936 (some three weeks before Potaka cabled Byrd for "300 pounds backing"), a motion that the report of the sub-committee concerning the dispute between Bydder and Potaka be forwarded to the Ethical Committee was carried. Concisely noting the facts (as integrated into earlier paragraphs of this essay), the report asserted that Dr Potaka had contravened the ethics of the profession by his conduct.

The grounds he had given for his conduct evidently were insufficient to excuse that conduct, or judged to be irrelevant - and, indeed, it would seem, to this layman, that the only circumstance in which a locum tenens could expect ethically to set up a practice is if the principal doctor approved (or was indifferent) and thus did not file a complaint. Of course, the defendant - the former locum - could inject into the dispute charges against the former principal (and this Louis did in May and June, 1936). But would they be judged relevant, whether true or false? Whatever the merits of the charges introduced by Potaka (of unethical conduct and unreasonable behaviour, etc), Dr Potaka was by his own admission guilty of setting up in practice in Takaka and thus contravening the BMA's ethical guidelines.

How did the central Ethical Committee respond to the report from the Nelson

Division? And how did the local Division respond to that response?

At a Special Meeting in Nelson on 17 June, 1936, those present (including Potaka) were informed that the New Zealand Branch of the BMA “in reference to the Dr Bydder-Potaka dispute” had referred the matter back to Nelson “to make a recommendation to the Council in regard to the dispute”. And the following item in the minutes notes that Dr Potaka forwarded two copies of complaints of unethical conduct on the parts of Dr Bydder and Andrew”, which were duly “read”. We don’t know what was in the complaints, neither do we know if Louis spoke at length during the “considerable discussion” that led to the Division resolving that a resolution be sent to the Council stating: “It is the opinion of the Nelson Division that the responsibility of a decision in this case must rest with the central authority: the evidence enabling them to reach a decision has been forwarded. Such decision will be free from any question of local influence or partisanship, as has been suggested by the defendant”. But they did not leave the matter there.

The 17 June meeting resolved further that the opinion of the Nelson Division is:

1. that in the event of Dr Potaka agreeing to withdraw from practice in Takaka that no further action be taken;
2. that in the event of Dr Potaka agreeing to this he should give a written undertaking in 14 days; and
3. that in the event of his refusal to do so the Nelson Division is of the opinion that the penalty of contravening Section 12 page of the Medical Ethical handbook be enforced.

The only additional information we have on the 17 June meeting indicates that a motion (moved by Dr Brunette) to omit section 3 of the resolution was lost; and that there was an “animated discussion....many members taking part”.

The three-point “opinion” of the Division on 17 June was presumably intended to influence the central authority; and one feels that it was carefully and generously crafted (probably by Jamieson and one or two others in advance of the meeting). His professional peers in the Division were offering Dr Potaka a way out of his difficulty – without “further action”. And at the same time they were bluntly warning of the consequences of refusing the offer. Perhaps those who opposed the inclusion of the third point felt that it would only unleash Louis’ tendency to dig his heels in, to be tenacious – bring out his stubborn streak – and thus be counter-productive. Tangling with committees and others during his Murchison days had shown that he could be a feisty fellow, when aroused, especially when he felt he had been treated badly. Those who voted to retain the third point may have hoped that it would be a reality check for Louis and thus persuade him to accept the offer to quietly leave Takaka, and practice elsewhere. Those, if any, who hoped for this outcome, misjudged the forces driving Louis - internal, and probably external.

In any event, there is no mention of the dispute in the one-page of minutes we have

for the Division meeting held on 4 July, 1936 (at which neither Potaka nor Bydder were present), but perhaps nothing too remarkable was happening in the weeks immediately following 17 June. However, in late July or early August, it appears, the dispute was developing significantly. Certainly, letters were being written and delivered, one of them of a critical nature.

The minutes of a Division meeting held on 8 August reported the receipt of “a letter from Dr Potaka refusing to accept the decision of the Nelson Division”, and noted the moving of a motion “that Dr Lynch be asked for a copy of his letter to Dr Potaka”.

Presumably, Louis was responding in that letter to the Division’s resolution of 17 June, and that Lynch’s letter to Potaka (duly “received and read” at the 5 September meeting) had conveyed that resolution to him, perhaps with some advice. We may never know. But we may speculate further about Louis’ letter.

We may, I think, confidently surmise that his letter rejecting the decision was more than a brief one-liner – that in it Louis repeated his arguments and allegations, and probably more stridently than before. It seems clear that temperamentally he was especially aroused when he felt he had been treated badly – and perhaps the inclusion of the third point in the resolution had goaded him into responding defiantly (and perhaps Dr Brunette had felt that this might happen). One can imagine how dismayed Dr Jamieson, and others who were genuinely fond of Louis and had known him for some years, had been when he spurned their offer to leave without fear of “further action”. And one wonders if in his letter he expressed any feelings about the “penalty” for his unethical conduct that his refusal to leave Takaka would incur. Did he, in fact, know what the penalty was, or was likely to be?

I do not know. Nor have I read anywhere what it might have been. But it seems probable that at the very least the penalty would be denial of (or the revoking of) the right to practice medicine in the area in which the offence had occurred – in this instance, the Takaka area (how otherwise could he be forced to close his practice in Takaka?). Together, perhaps, with a fine – for wasting the time of so many professional colleagues.

More likely, however, one feels, the penalty would not be merely a token one – a geographically limited one. De-registration as a doctor (or the revoking of one’s licence to practice) would apply throughout New Zealand (if not, everywhere). The period of suspension might, however, not be for life: one can imagine circumstances (“extenuating circumstances” perhaps) where those who decide these matters would impose a suspension for a lesser time period. Was Louis so confident about his case that he did not contemplate losing?

It is not hard to imagine that the loss of his doctor’s licence for any period of time would have very seriously damaged Louis’ reputation, not to mention his self esteem.

Indeed, I cannot think of a penalty that he would have considered more humiliating – or one more likely to unsettle his mind. The doctor who had served with Admiral Byrd in



the Antarctic and who had been described as a wonderful success by him; one of only a handful of Maori to have earned a medical degree; one who many expected to distinguish himself, as a healer, and perhaps in other fields. Cast out by his peers for unethical conduct!

How many times did Dr Jamieson go to bat for Louis, winning him time “voluntarily” to pack up and move away? We understand that Dr Jamieson advised Louis at some point that the deadline for him to leave would be extended by two months (which probably meant the end of September). Speaking for the Nelson Branch, did he ask Louis to come to Nelson in early October, hoping to hear that Louis had agreed to accept the verdict of his peers, and to leave quietly? Or had time run out already, and Louis been summoned to hear what penalty had been decided upon? We have no information about the purpose of the October 2 meeting.

With certainty, we can record here that the March, 1936, petition about Potaka continuing to be the NMO, had still been unresolved. And that in early August Dr Potaka was complaining to the Nelson Health Board of “cases of non-admission of his patients to Nurse Hyland’s private Hospital, subsidized by the Board” (and that subsequently the NHB advised Hyland that since they received a subsidy from the NHB they were obliged to take all patients); and that Dr Paget of the Health Department was to submit a report on the matter to his Department. And we also read in the NHB minutes that “Dr Bydder had bought the title to property leased by Nurse Bethune”.

However much time those involved in the dispute were anguishing over it, individually and in committee, that winter the “war between the doctors” was apparently in full swing, on several fronts – though this, we were told, did not prevent the Bydder and Potaka from seeing each others’ patients in an emergency - and “Takaka was virtually split in half far as medical care was concerned”, with Sister Hyland being widely blamed because of her animosity, or alleged animosity, towards Louis Potaka.

We might wonder what Sister Lynda Hyland was saying or doing or thinking about Potaka and the situation at this time, in 1936. As noted earlier, she had given written evidence in May, 1936, to the Nelson Division of the BMA about Potaka; and it is unlikely that she had revised her opinion of his professional behaviour while Dr Bydder’s locum tenens, or that she looked kindly on his attempts to have her replaced when Bydder was overseas, or was thrilled when she heard of Potaka’s allegations that she had abused him verbally when the two doctors and she had first met on Bydder’s return. Would she have confirmed that Potaka had mockingly said “Dr Hyland had run the practice” when he was the locum? How would she have responded to the comment that she was the reason for Bydder’s practice declining while he was away? Would she have agreed with Louis’ assertion (to the Nelson Division) that “matters could have been handled amicably” and that if the matter had been discussed quietly there would “never have been any trouble”. Presumably she would have emphatically denied any knowledge of somebody threatening “that there would be a dead Maori in the hospital”. Would her diary, or letters, have revealed a case of “gender conflict” in medical circles – severe enough to excite medical historians? Severe enough to explain why Potaka despised her,

and she him? Or did they both have valid non-gender problems and complaints with and about each other?

Frankly, as far I know, the good Sister left no more evidence than Potaka did for us to know what the Hyland-Potaka feud was all about, or to judge who was at fault, or to what degree each was!

In any event, there are other questions that would seem to be more pressing, for an understanding of Louis and his thoughts and actions, including the following. How was Louis' claim for monies owed to him by Dr Bydder proceeding? What had Louis written in his letter rejecting the decision of his peers in the Nelson Division? Did it include anything new? Did he feel persecuted? Was there a hint of paranoia? Did he offer an alternative solution? Did he ever doubt the validity of the case he had argued? Had he carefully considered accepting the offer that he could move away from Takaka without any consequences? How did he cope over the next several weeks? To whom did he turn to for advice, and for support? Did anybody offer advice? Did he write to anybody? What did people in the community know about, or think about, his problem with his practice? Who, if anybody, knew that he had injured his eyes while at Little America, and that they were bothering him still? Did anybody know, or suspect, that Louis was visually impaired? Did he fish and golf and exercise his dogs and attend to patients as though nothing was wrong, or was he seriously concerned about his eyes and the way things were going in his professional life - and if so, how seriously? Did his family in the North Island have any idea that he was in trouble? Did Esther, his mother, know? If so, did she offer any advice?

The only firm information we have about the weeks immediately before October, 1936, and what happened on October 2, 1936, comes from the official "Depositions of Witnesses".

## *7: Tragic Death*

He had known the David Masons almost as long as he had been in the Valley. In early 1935 David (Rawiri meihana) had invited him out to his farm, and Louis had immediately felt at home. He became a frequent visitor, and they had become close friends, the farmer (and rangatira in the Golden Bay area) and the younger takuta. They frequently fished and hunted quail together; and often talked about animals, crops and rugby – Louis recalling matches he'd played in when at Otago University in Dunedin and when he was the MO in Murchison, and Dave telling of when he was a New Zealand rugby league representative and toured Australia in 1910. Twelve years older than Louis, David sometimes spoke about the Ngati Tanua tribe; Dr Peter Buck (Te Rangi Hiroa), who had graduated in medicine thirty years before and had in July, 1936, assumed the directorship of the Bishop Museum in Hawaii; Maori-pakeha relations; and the policies of the Labour Party. And sometimes Louis would tell Dave and Mary (Ngara) about BAE2 - and Dave would wonder why a medical doctor had not bothered always to wear sunglasses in the summer and had thus allowed himself to become snowblind – but photokeratitis and damage to one's cornea were not topics that Louis was not inclined to explore with his layman friend. There were photographs and books in the Mason's house that Louis had given them, including a copy of Admiral Byrd's DISCOVERY – and Louis had told them that there was much more to the expedition than Byrd and his writer Charles Murphy had revealed. Fourteen-year old David Mason Jr. was intrigued by the idea of winter months without any daylight and why the Admiral would want to subject himself to months of isolation. Louis spoke well of Byrd, but did not seem to be responding to the letters and cards he was receiving from the U.S.A. Dave and Mary would not have said that they thought that Louis actually regretted that back in February, 1934, he'd chosen to go to Little America rather than to Western Samoa, and he'd evidently enjoyed the company of some of the men, especially those he had bunked with at Little America. But they couldn't see him rushing to join the next polar expedition that needed a doctor: at best he was, it seemed, ambivalent about the experience – and he'd missed his dogs.

And when it was obvious about the end of 1935 that Louis, serving as Dr Bydder's locum tenens, was still having a rough time working with the assertive and demanding Sister Lynda Hyland (and she with him), David was one of the first to suggest that he should think about one day starting his own practice in the district: he'd be assured of the support of those who, while they respected and liked Dr Ed Bydder, could not abide his Nurse/Matron. There were only about 2,000 people in the area, but might there not be enough wishing to come to Louis' surgery, to make it a viable proposition? They could form a Medical Association - the Pages (Wallace and Hubert) would surely support the idea, as would Hansen Winter and Ray Nalder and the Bakers and the Ryders - and they would very probably set him up as their doctor. Not to worry about the BMA! And without doubt the Maori would support the idea that Louis should continue as the NMO for the district, and thus receive the quarterly subsidy - and any further income that might result from being the NMO. There was still hope that Louis would be appointed NMO

permanently, in spite of the view of the Medical Officer of Health for Wairape-Hawkes Bay, Dr Wyn Irwin, that arbitrarily taking the job away from Dr Ed Bydder would be an injustice to Bydder, who had served as NMO before leaving temporarily for the UK.

And Dave had sympathized with Louis when Dr Bydder had abruptly terminated their locum arrangements on his return from overseas, and was outraged when Louis told him how much Dr Bydder still owed him. And, of course, he was there to celebrate when Dr Potaka had decided to take the plunge and practice medicine on his own account in Takaka, and when he had opened for business in March of 1936.

And he was pleased that Louis was planning some quail hunting as soon as the new season opened. Dave shared Louis' passion for the outdoors – though he was not inclined to venture into caves and other “holes in the ground”.

And then, later, when Louis was told that he must close down his private practice in Takaka, Dave Mason's signature had been one of the first on the petition from Takaka residents to the Ministry in Wellington affirming that Potaka had “acted up to the highest interests of the medical profession” and “retained their utmost confidence” and should be allowed to stay.

So, it was not surprising when on Wednesday, September 30, 1936, the yellow Dodge car pulled up in front of the house on the Mason farm, and Louis asked if he could stay for a couple of nights and whether Dave would drive with him over to Nelson on Friday. However, Dave was surprised that Louis was so worried...

And David Mason told the Nelson Coroner, Mr Thomas Edward Maunsell, on Sunday, October 4, what he remembered of the events of the past three days when the inquest “touching the death of Louis Hauiti Potaka” was resumed at the Nelson Public Hospital.

Mason's evidence followed that given the day before by Dr Percy Charles Edward Brunette, the recently-appointed Medical Superintendent of Nelson Public Hospital. On his oath, the Medical Superintendent had said:

“I am a duly registered medical practitioner and Superintendent of the Nelson Public Hospital. Deceased was admitted to the Hospital at 4.30 p.m. on October 2, 1936 in a comotose condition with a history of having taken a large dose of morphia two or three hours previously.

On examination he was unconscious, slightly stentorous breathing, pupils moderately contracted, cyanous lips and extremities, pulse feeble with a moist skin. Treatment was instituted immediately for poisoning by morphine. There was no response. He died at 6.20 p.m.

I am quite satisfied that death was compatible with morphine poisoning. It was certainly due to poisoning.

The body now lying in the morgue is that of Louis Hauti Potaka.

On the body a note was found to the effect that he had injured his eyes seriously while in the Antarctic and had not slept properly since January, 1935, and that death will be a relief.

Deceased's age was 35."

David Mason's evidence, on his oath, as recorded in a deposition, was:

"I am a farmer at Takaka and I have known the deceased for about eighteen months.

On Wednesday 30<sup>th</sup> September he came and stayed at my place, remaining there on that and the following night.

He appeared to be worried. The chief worry was about his practice and his finances and his Court case with Dr Bydder.

On Friday morning I left Takaka with him to come into town to see Dr Jamieson.

On the way in he was telling me how worried he was, repeatedly.

When we got to the top of Takaka Hill he said: "Dave, I have got some paper here. I want to burn it". I said: "Don't worry about the papers".

He persisted and so I stopped about a quarter of a mile before reaching Drummond's . We both got out. He put the papers on the ground and set fire to them. He went back towards the car. I remained to see they were properly burnt.

I heard the car door slam. When I got there the car had disappeared.

I followed down the road and stopped two cars. They said they did not pass a car. Then a young fellow told me he saw a yellow car go past. He had gone to Canaan. "I think he is Dr Potaka".

With Drummond and Campbell I went up the Canaan Road and after a while we saw him come out of the bush.

He walked towards us. He called: "Dave, it's no good. I'm finished." I said: "Finished what?" He said: "I have taken a big dose of morphia". I said: "What did you want to do that for?" He said: "I can't help it, Dave. Now I'm finished. I am going to have a rest."

I hurried him down to the doctor. I drove the car. Dr Green came out to meet us. Met him at bottom of the hill.

Dr Green gave him some injections and we went straight on to Nelson. About a mile from the bottom of the hill he stopped talking. From then on he was unconscious.

In the car he left a card, (produced).

On one side of the card was written:

“A hopeless position. Life just as impossible as death. L.H.Potaka.”

On the back of the card were the words:

“My good friends, forgive me. L.H.P.”

Mason’s deposition makes no reference to the note found on the body on October 2, as described by Dr Brunette (...“death will be a relief”). And Brunette does not refer to the card that (it appears) Mason produced (“...forgive me. L.H.P.”). Whether or not either or both were written “during the journey from Takaka”, as the newspapers reported, is not clear. One newspaper referred to them as the “Deceased’s Farewell Message”.

It seems surprising that there is no official record of questions asked at the Inquest (assuming questions were asked), or of additional evidence. One would have thought a query about the serious eye injury while in the Antarctic would have been posed (“Did Dr Brunette’s examination show any evidence of previous injury to the eyes?” “Could any of his friends or medical acquaintances shed any light on the injury, for the record?” “Had anybody any knowledge of any vision problems related to that injury that the deceased may have been struggling with?”). And that Dr Jamieson would have been asked to say why he and Potaka had arranged a meeting in Nelson on October 2. And Mason and Dr Green would have been asked what Potaka had said in his last moments of life “before he stopped talking”.

But perhaps the Coroner had already heard enough to arrive at his verdict.

And his verdict at the completion of the inquest, noted in the record and in the media, was brief: “After hearing the evidence the Coroner returned a verdict that deceased died from morphine poisoning self-administered while in a state of deep mental depression”.

## 8: *Rototai and Retrospect*

Sixty years later, the death of Dr Louis Potaka was remembered by one person who was then a sixteen-year old as “making me very sad when I heard of it; he was so young”. Another person wrote, in 1996: “I can remember his death as if it happened yesterday – a sad ending for a courageous little man”. “I was only eighteen at the time of his tragic death...he was a fine doctor and very likeable man”, wrote another, in 1998. Miss Alice Wells, the nurse who had known him as a friend, said, in 1996: “When he died it left a sad space which was filled often before with a kind, smiling face”. For a nine-year old farm boy, “the manner of Dr Potaka’s death was for me and my friends high drama indeed”. “All I remember, as a young child”, wrote another, “is that Dr Potaka’s death upset my parents a great deal. And for a long time they spoke about it as such a waste of a good, kind and clever man”. “I had been to see the Dr on different occasions with one or two minor complaints and found him a marvelous Dr and was very sad to lose him”, remembered William Holmwood, who had, along with two other men, “helped to build Dr Potaka’s gravestone”.

At the October 3, 1936, meeting of the Nelson Clinical Society one minute of silence was observed “in memory of Dr Potaka”. And at the meeting of the Nelson Division of the BMA on the same day, the ten members present, at the request of Chairman Dr Jamieson stood for a moment in silence “out of respect for the late Dr Potaka”. He had “been a man of many outstanding qualities, interested in sports and games, generous to a degree and full of hospitality and kindness”. The minutes then noted that the chairman “feelingly expressed the regret of members of his untimely decease”. And that it was resolved that “a letter of condolence be sent to the relatives of Dr Potaka and floral tributes to be forwarded”.

Two December, 1936, messages in the Ohio archives probably represent the feelings of all the BAE2 members – Quin Blackburn’s letter to Paul Siple said: “Was very surprised and stunned to read of the death (suicide) of Dr Potaka, and the news was a severe blow, you can be sure”; and E.L. Moody’s to Byrd read: “Sorry to hear of Potaka. He was one of my closest friends on the expedition. I had corresponded with him up until two months before his death”.

Whatever may have been the wishes of the Potaka family concerning where Louis should be buried, the wishes of David Mason and his wife prevailed. Mr C.P.Reilly bought Plot 49 in Block 4 of the Rototai Cemetery in Golden Bay and the funeral notice in the *Nelson Evening Mail* of October 5, 1936, read:

The friends of the late Dr Louis Hauti Potaka are respectfully invited to attend his funeral, which will arrive at the Rototai Cemetery tomorrow (Tuesday) at 2.30 p.m.

The funeral is remembered as having been “the largest ever in Takaka”. No doubt the gathering included representatives from his Masonic Lodge in Nelson, from the Takaka

Medical Association and from the medical community in Nelson, as well as friends and patients. There may also have been mourners from Murchison and from Otago Medical School in Dunedin; and probably the floral tribute from the Nelson Division of the BMA.

Who conducted the funeral service and who eulogized Louis and what they may have said we don't know. Dr Jamieson may well have spoken, as may have Louis' close friend pharmacist H.F. West. If so, one imagines that they did not dwell on Louis' assertion that he had had "no alternative" but to open a practice in Takaka when Bydder abruptly fired him, nor his subsequent dealings with the local division of the BMA. And if they were aware of any lingering problems with his vision, they would not have chosen to elaborate. Jamieson and West, I suspect, knew more about Louis Potaka and Louis' state of mind in 1936 than most present - but, like most others, they probably knew little more about the last few days of his life than was reported in the newspapers, based on the evidence given at the inquest; and it's unlikely that even they would have claimed to understand completely Louis' "deep mental depression".

And Rototai on that Tuesday was not, of course, the time publicly to discuss it.

Mrs Esther Potaka and one daughter had hastened to Nelson from Wanganui to attend Louis' funeral; and her eldest son's recent state of mind, yet alone the factors that had contributed to it (including anxiety over his eyes), had probably not been known to her, or to other family members in the North Island. We surmise that it's more likely that as far as they knew, Louis was thoroughly healthy and doing well professionally in Takaka. Now he was gone - and five years younger than his father had been when he died prematurely in 1919.

We have no idea what, in due course, his mother came to make of Takaka and her son's problems there in 1935 and 1936 and Louis' decision to end his life - or how she spoke of them to her other children and her grandchildren. We do know, from an informant, that after the October funeral she returned to Wanganui with all Louis' possessions, including his golf clubs, and even some photos and books from the Masons' home. And from that time on her pride in Louis' accomplishments in life was evident in the display of photos of him and of his memorabilia in her home, in Wanganui and then on the farm in Utiku (back to which she moved within a few years of Louis' death).

Later in the month, Mrs Potaka received a letter from the Nelson Hospital Board conveying the NHB's sincere sympathy on her loss. And perhaps that letter also reported to her that the chairman, Major R. Dagger, had said at the October meeting of the Board - according to the *Golden Bay Times* of October 29, 1936 - that Dr Potaka had given very satisfactory service when he was house surgeon at the Nelson Hospital, and that Mr F. Page had declared that "The people of Takaka felt they had suffered a grievous loss. Dr Potaka was full of sympathy for those in distress and he would attend patients irrespective of prospects of receiving remuneration". And doubtless other letters expressing sorrow and extending condolences were received by Esther and her family. It was some considerable time, however, before she heard from Admiral Byrd.



When the news of Dr Potaka's death reached Byrd – and how it reached him - is not clear. The following letter dated November 19 to “My dear Mrs Potaka” suggests that he knew within four or five weeks. He wrote:

I have just learned of the loss of your son. I want to send you from myself and every other member of my Expedition deepest sympathy.

Your son was beloved by all and was a very gallant gentleman, and every man is grieved. Dr Potaka saved the life of at least one of my men and perhaps several others. I hope some day to get the opportunity to express in person my sympathy.

With all goods wishes,  
Very sincerely yours.

It was not, however, until January 20, 1937, that the above letter was mailed, enclosed in the following letter to Mr David Mason, Takaka:

My dear Mr Mason,

I am not in possession of the address of Dr Potaka's mother, and as I am extremely anxious to have the enclosed letter delivered to her I wonder if you would see that it reaches her. Anything you do will be greatly appreciated by me.

With kind regards,  
Sincerely yours,

P.S. I have written to some friends of mine that some flowers be put on Dr Potaka's grave. I would greatly appreciate any further information you might give me concerning him. I liked Dr Potaka, and am grieved at his death. Since I returned from the Antarctic, I wrote him many letters, but he did not answer any of them. I have often wondered why. He did write me once, but it was not an answer to any of my letters.

In the final sentence, Byrd is evidently recalling Potaka's letter of April 30, 1936, but he is not divulging its contents or their subsequent exchange of cables in June. As for the flowers – Byrd had sent five dollars to R.S.Black in Dunedin in a letter dated November 19, 1936; and his letter and the donation had been forwarded to Mr Frank Paape of the Grand Hotel in Dunedin for his attention as Secretary of the Antarctic Society. And presumably flowers were placed on the grave in Rototai.

In any event, Mason immediately responded to Admiral Byrd from Takaka, on February 2, 1936:

Mr R.E.Byrd  
Boston,  
Massachusetts.

My Dear Mr Byrd,

Yours to hand dated 20<sup>th</sup> January, 1936. Late Dr Potaka often spoke a lot of you concerning Antarctic trip. He appreciate very much. He is a great friend of mine. I have missed him very much. It gave me a great shock.

I were going to drop you a few lines but not knowing your address not able to. I appreciate your sympathy to Late Dr Potaka. The wife and I often goes to cemetery to put flowers on his grave.

I have forward your letter to Late Dr Potaka's mother. If you wish to have her address I am please to let you have it:

Mrs A.Potaka Utiku, "Taihape" New Zealand

Anything you want me to do I am only to please

I have enclosed full report of Late Dr Potaka's death, which would be interesting to you. It was my wife and my wish to have him brought back to be buried at Rototai Cemetery, Takaka, 80 miles from Nelson

Prosperous New Year  
Kiaora  
With Kind Regards  
Sincerely Yours,  
David Mason

Mason might have told Byrd that Potaka's supporters in Takaka were planning to raise funds for a memorial over his grave at Rototai; and perhaps in due course Byrd was sent a photo of the grave and memorial with a double chain around it. Already larger than the surrounding headstones, Louis Potaka's was very considerably enlarged later – and probably his mother paid for the work, with some help, perhaps, from the Freemasons.

The Masonic symbol on the upper tombstone is flanked on one side by a plaque with personal details and on the other by a plaque with the inscription:

IN MEMORY OF A GALLANT GENTLEMAN OF  
THE BYRD ANTARCTIC EXPEDITION

On the lower level, an inscription reads:

ALTHOUGH MAN'S WAYS IN LIFE ARE NARROW

## THE GATES OF HEAVEN ARE WIDE L.H.POTAKA

Byrd had called Louis a “gallant gentleman” (and we recall that Captain Scott had so described his two companions in a letter written in the tent in Antarctica in which all three perished in 1912). As for the second inscription, we are not sure that Louis himself wrote it - or when - or, indeed, what he wanted to convey. Was it something he composed when burdened by troubles in 1936? (One hears echoes of Matthew, Chapter 7; but not quite those words).

Byrd’s understanding of Potaka’s troubles came primarily from the information (presumably press reports of the October, 1936, inquest) that Dave Mason sent him with his February, 1937, letter, and from Potaka’s April, 1936, letter to Byrd. And he integrated some of what he knew into a “Memorandum” for the members of BAE2. In what appears to be the final draft of several, his “Memorandum”, in the Ohio files, concludes with the sentence: “In a note he left, Potaka said his eyes had kept him awake but he wrote me last spring that, although his eyes had given him considerable annoyance, he was feeling better – ‘that it is only the annoyance, the sight not being affected’”. (The Admiral did not mention that Potaka, in the note described at the Inquest, had written “to the effect that he had injured his eyes seriously while in the Antarctic”. And one wonders whether in Little America Byrd had been aware that Potaka’s “injury” and that his self-prescribed treatment with cocaine drops for keratitis in January 1935 had resulted, according to Bob Young, in “milky and puffy eyes”).

Louis’s statement in the note that he had injured his eyes seriously while in the Antarctic does, however, seem to suggest that the “annoyance” was not so minor. It is not perhaps far-fetched to suggest that he may have suffered permanent eye damage: that the “skin” over the eye, the cornea, had been damaged by the cocaine. Was Louis, in fact, struggling from January 1935 onwards with seriously impaired vision? If so, he would, of course, have been acutely aware of this – and he would also have known the impact it would very likely have on his fitness to pursue his medical career if it were known to others. One has the feeling that his final note is the only time he is, publicly at any rate, admitting that the injury had been “serious”, the word implying (I think) that it had resulted in lasting consequences for his eyesight.

What the reporters and editors knew about the injury we don’t know; but the report in the press of the note found on his person was headlined as “Serious Injury to an Eye While in the Antarctic” and “Suffered Eye Injury in Antarctic” (October 3, 1936). And it would seem that for many this became the principal reason (if not the only reason) why he was deeply depressed and why he took his own life... “I have not slept properly since January 1935. Death will be a relief”. A serious physical injury, sustained while heroically serving his fellow men in extreme environmental conditions, in a remote region, that had claimed the lives of famous explorers, was the only way, perhaps, that people could begin to make sense of the suicide of a young, active and gifted medical doctor.

We had Bob Young recording at Little America that Potaka was snowblind on

January 24, 1936, and was worried that he had “ruined his eyes” (Section 4, p.43); and now we must quote from the Bob Young letter dated February 28, 1937: it reveals more. Writing to a friend from the Sailors Home in Auckland, after a year away in “Aussie”, Young says:

“I was sorry to learn when I arrived back here last Monday that Dr Potaka our medico on the ice for 15 moths committed suicide 3 or 4 months ago – he went snowblind soon after I did but he took a long time to get better. I remember now him telling me that he might as well commit suicide as his eyes would be no more good to his profession. I had nearly recovered from my snowblindness but still very sore. I told him to cut out talking like that. He never answered.”

Did Louis really mention suicide to Bob? I don’t think Young would have made that up (but we would dearly like to examine Bob’s (missing) diary for January 1935 to see if he had recorded in it that conversation and that comment and his response! If young Louis did confide in the older, hardened naval veteran of the Great War, he got a typically straight answer! (And perhaps not one that would be approved by professional analysts today!).

However, Bob Young also wrote: “I thought he would forget about it as he and I were decent cobbers. He couldn’t get on with the Yanks too well...”. And by all accounts, Louis Potaka did get on well with the “Yanks”. So, it’s possible he may have misheard or misunderstood Louis, and two years later, hearing of the suicide, and “remembering now”, believed that Potaka had mentioned “suicide” to him. Certainly we have no evidence that any other member of BAE2 heard the doctor talk about suicide. But perhaps one would only make such a remark to one’s “decent cobber”?

So, when did Louis first contemplate suicide? In January 1935, down South, as Young claims? Or was it, in fact, in Takaka in the winter of 1936 when the financial outlook seemed so bleak, and he was unsuccessfully seeking “financial backing”? Or was it when the Nelson Division of the BMA had expressed the opinion that he had been guilty of unethical conduct, and that, unless he agreed to quit Takaka, he should be penalised? Or when his renewed protestations, in his July/August letter to the Division about Dr Bydder’s “abnormal behaviour”, failed to change the verdict? As the deadline set for him to close his practice in Takaka approached, did he slide into a depression – day by day his mental strength weakening, the depression deepening, the demons within taking control – and become suicidal?

I think there was always great anxiety about his injured eyes – indeed, I would suggest that he may have been significantly visually impaired and had been concealing his impairment (and avoiding examination by an ophthalmologist). I sense a steady deterioration in his mental health, in August and September 1936, with frequent bouts of depression and some paranoia as he battled the BMA committees – and simultaneously struggled with increasing and debilitating anxiety about his vision. Whether he was taking medication, I don’t know (and I have seen no evidence indicating that he was); and if so, whether it was prescribed by another doctor and what it might have been - and how

it might have helped or hurt him, I have no idea.

My considered opinion is that his two-day visit to the Masons before going to Nelson was primarily a desperate attempt to seek advice about his financial and legal predicament. There was friendly support, but did Mason know of Louis' continuing vision problem? And was there sufficient impartial and rational examination of how matters had developed that winter and debate about how he should now proceed – what his options were? In any event, the tenacious, though anguished, Louis remained convinced that he was needed by his patients in the valley, that he was within his rights to remain in practice there, and that his friend Dr Jamieson, and others, would prevent his expulsion from Takaka, with the loss of prestige (mana) and reputation that would assuredly follow - and perhaps the end of his professional career as a medical doctor.

And on the morning of October 2, 1936, as they left the farm to go to meet Dr Jamieson in Nelson, rather than having resolved how to deal constructively with his problems and thinking optimistically of a future in medicine elsewhere, he was on his way determined to “win his case”, carrying with him notes he had prepared that, he believed, would compel Jamieson to support him. He would carry the day. He had to – his late father, and his close and extended families expected nothing less than vindication, and success in his chosen profession.

But then, I surmise further, as they made the long climb up Takaka Hill, Louis repetitiously reciting his arguments to his increasingly worried friend Dave, it dawned on him (perhaps not for the first time – but this time not in the night as he drifted in and out of sleep, but in broad daylight), in a moment of clarity, that his notes contained nothing new – that the BMA had heard it all before, and they had decided that his arguments had no merit: he was guilty. His mission to Nelson was certain to fail. He would be disgraced, whatever the penalty. If his eyesight had not thus far ended his career, his rash actions in Takaka and those who were intent on bringing him down for making injudicious decisions were about to do so.

And deep despair descended again, triggered by great fatigue...and it became clear to Louis that there was only one way out.

If he had thought before that it might have to end that way, on Takaka Hill he knew it had to. And he had his medical bag with him. “Stop the car, Dave”...“My good friends, forgive me”.

In the absence of medical records about the nature and seriousness of Louis' eye troubles (and about any medication he might have been taking), and without answers to some of the unanswered questions – including the truth about the papers he insisted on burning that October day and what he talked about to Dave in the last moments of consciousness as they drove down Takaka Hill - one is inclined to agree in general with the reported view of David Mason that Louis Potaka's suicide resulted from the combination of circumstances and pressures he found himself in.

The combined weight of the financial, legal, professional and personal health problems that beset him drove him to despair. Perhaps to thinking that he was a failure; that he had not fulfilled his expectations, or those of others. That he had no future.

And perhaps because of too many cocaine drops in his eyes over several, if not many days, to deaden the dreadful pain of his snowblindness that January in the Antarctic, Louis had to face life constantly “annoyed” by his eyes - and without seeing clearly...And we don’t doubt that because of his eyes he had been continually robbed of sleep for many months and his reserves of mental strength sapped.

But for the fatigue, would Louis have weathered the problems and pressures he faced?

My thought is, that sleeping normally he would very likely not have gotten so deeply into trouble and conflict in 1935 and 1936! Perhaps not even with Sister Hyland. Possibly not with Dr Ed Bydder. And very probably not with the BMA. And if he had, his natural intelligence, education and life-experience would have eventually guided him out of further trouble: he would have known when to change course, to accept that he had made mistakes. And if his feisty personality had, indeed, led to his pleading his case before the Nelson Division of the BMA, he would have been alert and prudent enough to recognize, and to seize, the fair opportunity his peers in the Division were offering: to move on, and practice elsewhere, without further consequences. But sleep deprivation – extreme fatigue – had impaired his judgment; he acted erratically, argued irrationally, his mind frequently confused and often in great turmoil...

In his few short years as a healer, Dr Louis Potaka had helped so many others... but he had not always taken proper care of his own eyes in the Antarctic and inadvertently had caused them to be seriously injured in January 1935 ...and even as he continued caring for the sick and the distressed and the dying, in 1936...he could not help himself when he most needed help...

## 9: *Postscript*

Louis Potaka's two English Collie dogs remained in Takaka, David Mason taking one and C.P.Reilly the other. The yellow Dodge car was returned to Wallace Page; and Potaka's bronze plate (inscribed "Dr L.H.Potaka) "somehow came into the possession" of his young Uncle Jack (who was at school with him) and eventually to Jack's grandson Utiku Potaka (who, in 1999, wrote that it "is now viewed as a treasure of the Potaka family"). And Ike repaid his debt to Aunt Ada by leaving his interest in the family farm to her (and she subsequently, in 1963, left the same interest to Ike's youngest brother Utiku's family, Utiku Albert (after surviving WW2 as a bomber pilot) having been killed in a car crash in June, 1958).

Of course, it "became unnecessary to proceed" (in the blunt words of the chief official in Wellington) with the proposal to the Health Department that Potaka should be appointed "medical officer to the Maoris" (NMO) in the Takaka District. And, of course, Dr Potaka was no longer an alternative in Takaka to Dr Ed Bydder for medical care.

For a while, we were told, many supporters of the late Dr Potaka ("Potaka-ites") chose to travel to Nelson for their care. In due course, Dr McCormick and then later, from the early forties, Dr Aylward (a medical missionary from China whose "redhaired freckled pig-tailed daughter Penelope", according to one informant, "fluttered the hearts of many young males") looked after those patients in Takaka who did not choose to go to Dr Bydder and to his 5-bed private hospital in Commercial Street under Matron Lynda Hyland. And the sharp division of feeling about socialised-public and private medical and hospital services in the Takaka District that had driven most of the antagonism between doctors and residents continued; and Dr Potaka was not forgotten at a public meeting on January 12, 1937.

Called to consider the establishment of a public Cottage Hospital in Takaka "by the use of funds from a bequest for that purpose by the late Miss I. Scott", and attended by "between 350 and 400 people" (including Dr Ed Bydder), the January meeting was lively from the start. And there was a "storm of protest from the hall, a dozen Maoris present rising and several moving forward to the platform wildly gesticulating" when Mr J.G.Page claimed that when Dr Bydder had been visiting England and there had been complaints Mr F.Page (J.G.'s brother) had "joined forces with another doctor, and there were people around the countryside trying to get Dr Bydder's practice for Dr Potaka". The *Nelson Evening Mail* (January 13, 1937) also reported that J.G.Page's remarks were greeted with "excited calls of 'Don't you mention his name', 'You sit down', 'Have you no principle'". Dr Bydder's private hospital continued for many years, but the Bethunes' maternity home in Takaka closed in February, 1937 (and later became a convent).

In the years immediately following Louis' death, Henry Francis West (M.P.S.) of Nelson sent a couple of letters to Admiral Byrd (and both letters - and Byrd's replies to them - survive in Ohio's Byrd Papers). The first, written in January 26, 1937, states:

I am writing in consequence of a paragraph I read in the paper coming from a Maori

named Mason. Dr Potaka had not spoken to his mother for many years and my place was always his home. He left here to go South and came back here. I would treat these with caution but this is not the object of my letter. I am astounded that you did not receive letters from him. One in particular he read to me and closed ready to post. But this is not the object of this letter.

A short time before his death he was in Nelson and had with him several Maori Curios which he was trying to get to you but they will not or would not let them go out of the country as these are extremely rare now. Dr P would not let them take what they wanted and leave the rest. I have these in my possession just now some are autographed in white ink. Now my proposition and object of this letter is to get them to you intact. The only way I can think of at the moment is you may have a friend on one of the boats who will bring them to you, one of the Pacific Mail Steamers. I will forward them to him and no questions will be asked, or if you can think of any other way I will also add a couple of axes I have if they are of interest to you. Probably Dr P will have told some of your officers about us.

And, after his signature, pharmacist West adds that: "I may say I am according to his will sole executor and residuary legatee".

One wonders whether the "curios" were Moa bones, mentioned by Potaka in April, 1936. In any event, Byrd replies to West on April 17, 1937, thanking the pharmacist and saying: "If the Doctor wished me to have the Maori curios, I should very much like to have them". Mr West could get them to the Secretary of the Antarctic Society in Dunedin. And it was "mighty good" of Mr West to present the axes to him.

West's second letter to Byrd, written a year later, in 1938, makes no mention of the curios and axes (and whether they had, in fact, left New Zealand). In it, West tells Byrd that:

"I am enclosing Dr Potaka's Notes which I only received today from the Public Trust Office. In whose possession they were I don't know and the Law of Libel in New Zealand prevents me from expressing an opinion. However, I forward them on at once, hoping they are not too late to be useful."

On March 21, 1938, Byrd acknowledged receipt of the Notes, saying: "I am glad to have them and appreciate your taking care of Dr Potaka's effects. I hope all goes well with you." We know, therefore, that the Notes were received in the United States (whereas there is no 'paper trail' about the dispatch or the receipt of the curios). But, as far as I know, the Notes are not in the Byrd Papers at Ohio; and one can only speculate about them, and who had "possessed" them, and why they might be "too late to be useful". Very likely, the Notes related to Potaka's Antarctic experience: probably they were professional reports on his fellow explorers; perhaps even medical papers about Byrd himself (perhaps some fact or opinion that Byrd might have wished to mention in *Alone*).



And then later in 1938 – almost exactly two years after Louis Potaka’s death – Mrs Esther Potaka (of Bignell Street, Wanganui) attended a luncheon of the Wellington Branch of the English-Speaking Union at which the United States Consul-General awarded medals. He conferred upon Mrs Potaka the United States Congressional Medal awarded to Louis Potaka. She was asked to accept it as a token of America’s “appreciation of the great work which your son did with the Byrd Expedition” and “she should know how keenly gratified Admiral Byrd is that the medal is being awarded”. Mr Gardiner of Wellington and Bernard Fleming of BAE2 made speeches when they received their medals. Esther did not; but it was reported that “Mrs Potaka intends to present the medal to the Wanganui Collegiate School, to be placed alongside an enlarged photograph of her son where it will remain for all time”. A letter from Admiral Byrd enclosing a letter from the Secretary of the Navy would also be given to the school.

In 1996 the Collegiate School verified that Dr Potaka’s Polar Medal was still at the school. However, the fate of the two letters to Mrs Potaka is not known.

The whereabouts of two of BAE2’s First Aid Medical Kits – a subject that had come up in October, 1935 – was resolved. The quest was resumed in 1939 when Byrd asked Jim Sterrett (who had been Potaka’s assistant) about the fate of BAE2’s medical equipment. Sterrett replied that Dr Potaka had taken boxes of surgical dressings, sutures and bandages and surgical instruments and laboratory equipment ...but that he (Sterrett) had two Medical Kits, including the one that the Admiral had taken with him to Advance Base. And in July 1939, that Kit – which the donors Wellcome Burroughs were understandably fretting about - was returned and saved for posterity. Doubtless what Potaka took - “which he asked for and was within his rights”, according to Sterrett (writing in February, 1939) – was put to good use in the months ahead. We do know that, apologizing for his absence from the June 6, 1936, meeting of the “Nelson Clinical Society”, he “sent a collection of splints for exhibition being part of the equipment for the Byrd Expedition”.

The BMA (New Zealand Branch) – with Dr J.P.S.Jamieson at the helm – continued vigorously to interact with the Government on the introduction of social security and National Health Insurance. The passage of the Social Security Act of 1938 was followed by a resounding election victory for the Government, which was then in a stronger position when negotiations with the BMA resumed...Dr Jamieson received the Gold Medal of the BMA in 1950 and a CBE in 1956, and died in 1963 and was buried in Nelson. A year before Jamieson’s death Dr J.B.Lovell-Smith of Auckland consulted Jamieson’s papers at his Nelson home when researching for a work entitled *The New Zealand Doctor and the Welfare State*; but we have no idea what subsequently happened to his papers (and his surviving child, a son Edward - one of four Jamieson children – who had retired in New Zealand in 1998, after a medical career in Britain, was, we were told, unable to help).

Dr Alan Green – the first doctor to see Louis on October 2, 1936 (and we have found no public statement or private account by Dr Green concerning the events of that day)

died in Nelson Hospital in 1956, aged 71.

Dr Ed Bydder, described by one informant (who was not one of his many devoted patients) as “notoriously difficult to get on with...he did not speak to another medico operating in the same area for 20 years”, continued to practice until the mid-1970s, when, Dr Perce Bydder told me, his “kids turned down offers of having the old house/hospital in Takaka which by virtue of having an unconditional private hospital license (issued in the early 1930s) had significant tax and other benefits”. Two of his three children had gone into medicine (and the fourth into Physics), and one who had qualified in 1965, wrote, in 1998, that by the 1970s “General Practice no longer appealed to his children who had seen modern medical specialists robbing GPs of most of the interesting components of medicine”. To the day of his death, “the old man”, Dr Perce Bydder believed, never forgave any of those who set up the Labour-Medical Movement: they were his enemies, and he thought of Potaka as a victim of the pressure from the Movement. Dr Edward Coventry Bydder was awarded the MBE in 1967, and he died in 1976.

Sister Lynda Hyland retired as Matron of Bydder’s private hospital in 1938 when she married Jack Vaughan (who later married Helen Scott, nee Winter) and was a pillar of the Presbyterian Church (and held “rather strong views about spirituous liquors and their consumption”; so that those close to her drank with considerable caution and never around the house”). She often cared for the Bydder children in her home when their parents were out of town, and they called her “Aunt Lynda Anne”. She died in 1965, mourned by nieces and other relatives and friends, and doubtless remembered by those she had cared for – or their children - in her professional life.

Floss Winter - said to have been a very close friend of Louis and perhaps engaged to him or about to be engaged to him at the time of his death, and remembered, in 1998, as a “dear, shy and reserved person” – became Dr Percy C. Brunette’s first wife and died at the early age of 56, leaving two teenagers. A building at the Nelson Hospital was named after Dr Brunette OBE.

Dr D.C. (Port) Low published in 1972 *Salute to the Scalpel*, a well-illustrated and informative, often anecdotal, medical history of Nelson and District (kindly sent to me in Canada by John Williams in 2005 - but found to have no significant information about Louis Potaka: on p.66 Dr Low records only that “Dr Potaka was in Takaka for some time”). He also contributed obituaries to the *New Zealand Medical Journal*, including one of Dr Ed Bydder in November, 1976 (Vol.84, No.576). In it, Dr Low emphasised that Bydder excelled in the many “paramedical activities” a doctor in a small somewhat isolated community was called upon to undertake, and that establishing a private hospital in Takaka – “staffed with registered nurses...and able to admit both maternity and odd surgical patients” – was a great boon to the district. (But there is no mention of his dispute with Louis Potaka).

David Mason represented Nelson Maoris in many important national gatherings, and he was president of the Takaka tribal committee at the time of his death in Nelson Public Hospital in his 78<sup>th</sup> year in 1966. I was told that, asked a year or two before his death

whether there was anything special about Golden Bay Maoris since there seemed to be more under-performing derelicts in the North Island, Dave had responded that “If a bum Maori comes to Golden Bay and has few assets, skills or prospects, I give them six weeks to move out of the District”. The questioner “thought it probably a bit of a jest”.

Pharmacist Henry Francis West, clearly a confidant of Louis for the last eight or nine years of Louis’ life, became the Chairman of the Nelson Hospital Board; and died in 1950 at the age of 77. His son, Ulric Robert Lockhart, and probably a close pal of Louis who was born about a year before Louis, died in 1957, aged 58. Helen Beatrice West (M.P.S.) lived till the age of 84, dying in 1982. (And one wonders what memorabilia and long-forgotten papers relating to Louis Potaka there may be in the attics of the homes of descendants of the Wests of Nelson – whoever, and wherever, they may be!).

The “self-satisfied, hard working community” in Takaka slowly emerged from the isolation of the 1930s, when, it is said, “factions and cliques were common”. A time when young women wore hats and gloves when shopping in the village and going to church, and when womens’ organisations were dominated by the older generation. When Catholics had their own rugby clubs and their own pubs...And the townscape has, of course, changed, over the past six or seven decades (and the “treasurepathway” webpage calls it a “fascinating mix of eras, well-recorded in the museum”); and visitors flock there in the summer months.

But the road over Marble Mountain continues to this day to be a memorable drive...and the Canaan Road, off that main road over Takaka Hill, is still rough though graded, traversing a valley on the top of the limestone ridge, and ending after several miles where a bullock track leads down to Golden Bay. The adventurous and energetic (trampers and speleologists) and those curious about erosional karstic features make their way along the road to deep Harewoods Hole, and hippies (in earlier decades) and rockers flock to open grassy spaces, especially on New Year’s Eve. They all pass the spot which old David Mason told his son, David Jr., was where the deeply troubled Louis came out of the bush on October 2, 1936, calling out: “Dave, it’s no good. I’m finished”.

Down South, on the White Continent, where men and women endure the cold and the long Winter Night in conditions rather more comfortable than Admiral Byrd and his men experienced in the 1930s, few pass the narrow ice-filled inlet about eight miles long indenting the north side of Thurston Island immediately south of Starr Peninsula. First delineated from air photos taken by the US in 1946, it was named “Potaka Inlet” for Dr Louis H. Potaka of BAE2.

We understand that the Tasman District Council (TDC) continues to keep the Rototai Cemetery where Louis is buried “in good order” and that the “beautiful spot set in the side of a wooded hill close to an estuary and surrounded by farmland...is always a sea of flowers”. David Mason, who knew more about Louis’ last few days and hours than anybody, and his wife Mary (Ngara), who lived to the age of 93, as well as David Jr and several Mason children also lie buried in Rototai.

And we end this biographical essay on Dr Louis Potaka with a further note on his mother, who had first set foot on New Zealand soil as a child of five in 1887, and buried Louis twenty-five years before her own death, in 1962.

With so little information about Esther, and about her and Louis, investigating the mother-son relationship has been virtually impossible. But I have a hunch that she was a strong influence on him from the time his revered father died, in 1919 – and that while he wanted her approval, he may have struggled to be free of that influence. And if there was one person he did not wish to know about his eye problems, and how they had come about, it was Esther.

This recollection, from James Edwards, a nephew of Louis, is of Mrs Esther Potaka (“Mum” to all her children and grandchildren) at home on the farm:

“She was a very astute manager of finance and of the Utiku farm. In those days swaggers (tramps and hobos) were on the road looking for work and for a meal. In a shed in one corner of the farm adjacent to the main road was kept a wood stove, firewood, bread, sugar etc and usually a forequarter of mutton, and it was restocked regularly. This was for use by swaggers and not a day went by when one of these gentlemen would be thanking grandmother for her kindness”.

## Appendix 1 - Acknowledgements

**Wilfrid Laurier University** (WLU) in Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, provided research grants to enable me to interview Dr Alton A. Lindsey (concerning BAE2) in West Lafayette, Indiana, in 1985, and to make two research trips to delve into the Byrd Papers in the Byrd Polar Research Center (BPRC) in Columbus, Ohio, in 1990 and 1993. The facilities of WLU have also been available for me to pursue the collection of information about Dr Louis Potaka from Waterloo, and to compose, copy and distribute successive drafts of this essay, or portions thereof.

The Archival Program of The Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio, provided space and assistance when Jackie Druery and I were researching at the BPRC and allowed us to have photocopies of papers and documents in the Byrd Collection, and subsequently provided copies of certain files via the mail. Had the Byrd Papers at the BPRC not been accessible to us, I would not have been motivated to attempt a biographical essay on Louis Potaka; and readers will appreciate how much Sections 4, 6, 7 and 8 owe to items in the Ohio archives. **The Archivist at the The OSU readily approved, in 2005, the inclusion of documents in their collection in this essay.**

Among the many other archives and libraries, museums and institutes that assisted us when we visited or corresponded with them, the National Archives in Washington D.C. and in Maryland, Otago's Hocken Library in Dunedin, the Nelson Provincial Museum in Stoke, the Golden Bay Museum in Takaka and the Canterbury Museum in Christchurch were especially helpful, providing photocopies of letters, papers and documents.

Obviously, I am much indebted to the media outlets in New Zealand that publicised my interest in Louis Potaka (and intention to compose a biography of him) and my request for information and recollections : the *Nelson Evening Mail*, *The Press* of Christchurch and *Nga Korero O Te Wa*. And the journal ANTARCTIC.

And I am greatly indebted to all those individuals who responded – voluntarily, of course, and with great enthusiasm - to those four probes in the media. I think readers will appreciate how significant their contributions are to the narrative. I am also indebted to all the individuals with whom we had dealings and with whom we made contact in other ways (some of them as a result of suggestions from other folk; some from searches on the Internet).

The following is, I think, a complete list of those who helped, directly or indirectly. A few were simply facilitators, and a number made relatively minor contributions.

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Daughtrey's continuing interest and assistance in my search for information; Professor Jim Rose's early letters and comments during his subsequent visit to Canada; the sustained interest in the project and in successive drafts of my essay of Professor Emeritus John Mackie; and two lengthy letters, full of insights and useful comments, from Dr Percy Bydder. **And my very special thanks to JD:** Jackie Druery has for two decades endured my mumblings (about BAE1, BAE2 - and Bob Young and Dr Louis Potaka in particular) and has been with me on related ramblings (far and wide) and has come to my aid frequently when I was fumbling on the Internet and with WordPerfect and MS Word. I have not, however, sought to inflict on her the task of proof-reading or editing the essay.

**None of the above, however, nor any person in the following list should be held responsible for any views expressed or comments made or information or misinformation in the essay!**

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(Wellington); Bert Spiers (Murchison); Olin Stancliff (USA); Tainui Stephens (Auckland)\*; Stuart Strachan (Dunedin); Dr Robert Tibbits (USA); Una Tsacalis (Palmerston North); Stephanie van Gaalen (Stoke); Dr Hal Vogel (USA); Alice Wells (Richmond); John Williams (Nelson); Cecil Wills (Richmond); Kirsty Woods (Wellington); Dr Rex Wright-St Clair (New Zealand).

\* To my suggestion to TVNZ in March, 1999, that Dr Potaka's story might be interestingly told on TV (even made into a fine movie), Tainui Stephens responded that "while the story is undoubtedly a good one...undertaking the long process to bring it to television life" was not feasible at this time.

## Appendix 2 - Illustrations

My original intention was to include copies of all photographs mentioned in the essay. For two reasons I have decided not to do so – first, because in several instances the copies I was able to make were of very poor quality; secondly, because reproduction of some of the photographs and their inclusion here might raise copyright issues. This Appendix does, however, provide notes on all the photographs – with the captions of each noting the date, or probable dates (?) for each; and its “source”, that is, where it came from (which does **not** necessarily indicate who took the photograph). At least three (7, 8 and 9) appear in published works.

1. In the orchard on the farm at Utiku (1905?): Louis Hauiti Potaka (left) with three of his sisters - Nukuteaio Selina (at rear), Rora Catherine (at right) and Wera Rawinia (in front).  
*Source: Neville Lomax's unpublished 1996 essay on Louis.*
2. Corporal Louis Potaka with fellow cadets at Wanganui Collegiate (1917?).  
*Source: Patricia Kennedy*
3. Mrs Esther Potaka and her seven children around the casket of Arepeta (Albert) Potaka, Louis' father: (July 7, 1919). Louis third from the right.  
*Source: Patricia Kennedy*
4. Louis and fellow participants at a Graduation Concert at Otago University (1929/30):  
“Ike” kneeling in front row, third from left.  
*Source: Neville Lomax's unpublished 1996 essay on Louis*
5. Dr Louis Potaka with friends in the Murchison area shortly after the earthquake (June, 1929?). Louis on the right. Mr Bert Spiers of Murchison third from left.  
*Source: the late Mr Bert Spiers.*
6. Dr Louis Potaka being welcomed aboard *Discovery II* by the ship's officers, Port Chalmers (February, 1934).  
*Source: Golden Bay Museum, Takaka.*
7. The BAE2 scientists meet in their hall to map out the research program. Little America. (1934) Dr Potaka standing, fifth from the left  
*Source: National Geographic, October, 1935. p.453*
8. Dr Potaka pulls an aching tooth for “Ike”. BAE2: Little America (1934).  
*Source: National Geographic, October, 1935. p.424*
9. Dr Potaka uses “painless” dentistry on Stevenson Corey. BAE2: Little America (1934)  
*Source: DISCOVERY by Richard E. Byrd (1935, opposite p.212).*



10. Dr Louis Hauti Potaka. (1935?)

*Source: Golden Bay Museum, Takaka.*

11. Dr. Potaka sits between, to his right, Nelson Hospital Medical Superintendent Dr D.C. (Port) Low and another doctor in a staff photograph taken outside the Main Entrance of the new Nelson Hospital, opened on 16 April, 1926. (1928 or 1929, or later?).

*Source: John Williams*

## Appendix 3 - Unanswered Questions

In the essay I frequently pose questions to which one would like the answers. In this Appendix, I list some of those and a few others. Some are specific, while others are general. And some are clearly more important (to an understanding of Louis Potaka and to clarifying decisions and situations) than others. This list is essentially the same as the list in earlier versions of the essay – though the final question is new, relating to my revised thoughts about Potaka’s eyesight.

1. When and where did the paths of Esther Caselberg and Albert Potaka first cross?
2. Was Louis born at home? (March 14, 1901)
3. Are there photos of Louis with his parents?
4. Is there a photo of young Louis with his Uncle Wilson and Aunt Ada?
5. Did he write letters to them? From school? From Otago? From Little America?
6. Did his sisters ever talk and or write about Louis...when he was a boy, when a student in Dunedin, when a man? Did they write to or receive letters from him?
7. Was Louis raised in the Jewish faith?
8. Was Esther’s Jewish heritage a factor in the family?
9. Did Louis have a spiritual advisor?
10. Is there a family photo – of Esther and Albert and their children?
11. When did Louis first show some scholarly leanings/ability?
12. Is Louis in the photo used in the Utiku School Centennial (1899-1997)?
13. Are there any further details known about Louis at Wanganui Collegiate?
14. Did he achieve high grades?
15. What were his favourite subjects?
16. Was he Head Boy?
17. Did he enjoy being in the Cadets?
18. Did he participate in sports and dramatics?
19. How did Louis come to go to Otago Medical School?
20. Why did he take more than six years to complete his medical studies?
21. Where are the two letters he wrote home from Otago? And what did he say in them? (The letters were in the Wanganui Museum, but were given to the Potaka family).
22. Did Louis make significant contacts/friendships while at Medical School?
23. Did Louis visit his whanaungu living at Otaku Marae?
24. Was Louis close to his Maori heritage?
25. Did he have an “identity problem”? Did he ever experience problems because of his Maori heritage?

26. Did Louis attend his 1930 graduation from Otago? Did any family members?
27. Is there a photo of Louis at his graduation/in his gown and hood?
28. How did Louis come to intern at Nelson Public Hospital in 1928-1929?
29. How soon did he meet and become friends with H.F. West, the pharmacist?
30. When did Potaka join the Masonic Lodge there? Was he an active Mason?
31. Why was there a problem with repairing the Doctor's House in Murchison (1929- 30) and making it available for Dr. Potaka after his appointment as the MO?
32. What did Dr Potaka write in letters to the Chairman of the Murchison County Council (August, 1930)?
33. Did Dr Potaka expect to be reappointed in June, 1933?
34. When and how did Dr Potaka become aware of Admiral Byrd's appeal for a doctor for BAE2? What did the newspaper advertisement say, Jan/Feb, 1934?
35. What were Dr Potaka's expectations when he prepared to join BAE2?
36. What were his first impressions of the Antarctic, and of his fellow explorers?
37. How did Dr Potaka get on with Admiral Byrd? Did he check his health, before and after Byrd's stay at Advance Base? Did he make Notes on Byrd's health?
38. Did Louis lecture or write about BAE2?
39. What did he imply when he told the reporter of the "Evening Star" on February 18<sup>th</sup>, 1935, that the main thing in the South was "to guard oneself against oneself"?
40. Besides Bob Young, who was aware of Dr Potaka's worries about his own snowblindness (January, 1935)? Did he consult an eye doctor after his return? Did he avoid doing so?
41. After his return from the Antarctic, did Louis visit his mother and family? Did he call or write to Esther and tell her about his experiences, and his plans, and his eyes?
42. How did he come to obtain the position of locum tenens for Dr Ed Bydder in Takaka (from June, 1935)?
43. How did Bydder and Potaka agree the practice should be run?
44. What did Dr Potaka do or not do that persuaded Dr Bydder to terminate the locum tenens arrangement?
45. Why did Nurse Lynda Hyland and Potaka not get along?
46. Where did Dr Potaka get the idea that Bydder's "abnormal" treatment of him after his return from overseas would justify his "putting up his own plate" in Takaka?
47. Was Potaka manipulated/used by anti-Bydder elements?
48. Did Louis' interest in archaeology in New Zealand get him into trouble?

49. In his letter to Byrd of April 30, 1935, and in his cable of June 20, was Potaka asking Byrd for money OR for “backing for an overdraft at his bank”?
50. Did Byrd misunderstand when he replied, writing on 29 June and cabling on 30 June?
51. What “arguments” and what “remark made by Potaka” is Byrd referring to in his June 29 letter to Dr Potaka?
52. Are there any photos of Potaka with Byrd, with Bob Young, with Dave Mason?
53. Did the two explorers that Potaka shared quarters with during BAE2 write about Potaka, in their diaries or in letters to him, and/or after his death?
54. Where is the (1936) report of Dr Paget to the Health Department? Did it support the idea of a public Cottage Hospital in Takaka?
55. Did it refer to the petition by local Maoris to make Potaka the Native Medical Officer?
56. Besides the depositions of Dr Percy Brunette and Dave Mason, what other evidence was given at the Inquest (October 3-4, 1935)?
57. Did Mr Drummond and Dr Green give evidence? Did any family members attend?
58. What papers did Dr Potaka burn on Takaka Hill on October 2, 1936?
59. What did Louis talk to Dave Mason about before losing consciousness on October 2, 1936?
60. How did Mason contact Dr Green?
61. Why was Dr Potaka coming to Nelson to see Dr Jamieson on October 2, 1936?
62. Was the Court case about money Potaka claimed (in his letter of April to Byrd) Dr Bydder owed him for his work as locum tenens? Are there legal records?
63. Are there any reports about the funeral and burial on October 6, 1936?
64. Why was Louis trying to call his mother on October 2, 1936?
65. Had Louis told others (besides Bob Young) about committing suicide?
66. What happened to the “Maori Curios”, and to the “Notes” sent to Byrd?
67. Would Potaka’s personal and private papers and his medical records give credence to the notion that his eyesight was significantly and permanently impaired in January 1935, and that this was not generally known?