

* Historical visit to Islands in

the Ohiva Harbour

Members of the Whakatane and District Historical Society recently combined with Opotiki members for a visit to islands in the Ohiva Harbour.

They visited Hokianga and Uretara (Ducker's) Islands. Hokianga, at the end of Ruatahuna Road, is the island used by Te Kooti at the time of his death in 1893.

In those days a big Maori population lived there growing kumara, pumpkin, water melon, potatoes and corn. They also gathered pips, mussels, dogfish, flatfish, stingray and shark.

They also gathered oysters from the rocks of the mangroves still on the west of the island. These sold for \$2 a sack in 1900.

Members were interested in two man-made harbours which were used by the canoes.

Uretara Island was of particular interest to Opotiki members as much of its history from 1839 was connected with Mr Thomas Black, whose descendants still live in Opotiki.

Uretara is now a public domain, unlike Hokianga, which is still the property of its Maori owners.

The following historical notes on Uretara were used by the leader of last week's visit, Mr Ken Moore.

Thomas Black came from County Tyrone where he was born in 1805 and emigrated to Australia. In time he made his way to the Bay of Islands, where his second son William was born in 1835.

VESSEL LOST

When the wars with Hone Heke became too much, Black along with so many other Europeans, fled south. Prior to this Governor Hobson had declared all land purchases void unless proved before commissioners — and in this respect

Thomas Black fell off side with one Gilbert Mair Sen, over land in the north, and this enmity was to last life long.

In 1839 Black entered Ohiva in a small schooner, but went ashore and the vessel was lost. — years later he was to claim that the cargo and vessel amounted to \$2,400.00. At the time of the wreck, a European named A. J. Nicholas was living on Uretara Island busy building a small trading vessel.

Naturally Black met Nicholas and arranged with him to purchase the island and a kind of deed was drawn up, but was not conclusive — for in time Nicholas left Ohiva and the land deal became a dispute.

Nineteen years later Black revived his claim on the island in his name only and then in the late 1860s there was a land court hearing and it upset him greatly to find that the Resident Magistrate was none other than Will G. Mair, a son of his old antagonist.

Even up to 1875 there was much wrangling, legal and otherwise, concerning the island, and as was the case with many another land speculator of the day, Black had entered into a transaction which could not stand the cold wind of official scrutiny.

It seems that in 1850 Black and his family left Uretara and went to Auckland, but returned later to take up residence as a trader at Matata, establishing stations at Mata-pihi, Onepu, Omai, Raukoko and Te Kaha. In later years he settled at Otara in Opotiki in 1864.

On March 2nd in 1869 Robert Pitcairn was killed by Te Kooti's men on Uretara Island. Pitcairn was in camp on the island shooting kuaika (god-wit), but on this day he had been away and upon his return he fell into ambush.

Drawing his canoe up to the beach he was met by a woman, his housekeeper, who took care to carry his gun; hidden nearby were four Hauhaus and one of them set upon the survivor, who was tomahawked.

DUCKER

The island took on this name after a Mr Ducker who ran a store near where the Ohiva Hotel formerly stood — there being quite a settlement in an area of what is now all mudflats.

There was the hotel, a wharf, store, a Post Office and other buildings.

From the notes of the late B. V. Cottrell, he states:— South of Hokianga up north records show that the first shipbuilding venture took place on Uretara Island in 1839 by three men, A. J. Nicholas and two brothers, master mariners, Richard and Robert Waddy. The island was an early trading post and had a good kauri house. On this island the bones of a ship were once visible and it is said the captain purposely ran his boat ashore, married into the local Maoris, who ate the crew and took the gunpowder they wanted so badly.

The Maori War veteran Biddle grew several acres of wheat on the island, and wattle, a curse on Ohakana Island, was introduced by Ducker, to produce tan for the leather industry. Ducker also raised chickens, selling them for 30c a head. Ducker also took the first cows to Fiji.

In 1861 the Government and authorities of the day had a real problem with the trading and bartering of firearms and so the revenue schooner Zillah was commissioned to detect gun running in the Bay of Plenty. Ohiva Harbour was searched a number of times as it was considered that such trading took place there.