



Auckland ethnologist, Mr Simmons, indicates an interesting feature of the Waioeka meeting-house to Mr Dave White.

## OPOTIKI DISTRICT IS RICH IN PRE-HISTORY

"The Opotiki district is very rich and important in pre-history and the history of New Zealand. It is rich in the doings of men ever since men were here."

### "WAIOEKA MEETING-HOUSE IS WONDERFUL FOLK ART"

The Waioeka meeting-house is a wonderful example of folk art, was the comment of Mr D. R. Simmons, ethnologist at the Auckland Museum, when he visited a number of historical sites in Opotiki recently.

The carvings and paintings on this meeting-house have some unusual features. For instance the main carving is of a man with a moustache and four fingers — as opposed to the traditional three-fingered carvings — paintings on the wall posts depict vases of flowers.

"Some people say that this is not Maori art, but it is, of a certain period," Mr Simmons said.

This style was known at Torere meeting-house, but it was very different from the Opotiki examples and contained two carvings of which the source could not

be located. When he saw similar work at Waioeka he could have "jumped with excitement."

"Just one piece can give a clue to a style through a whole area," he explained, describing the Waioeka style as "very lively and interesting." He added that "it doesn't matter whether it has great artistic merit or not."

This was said by Mr D. R. Simmons, ethnologist at the Auckland Museum, when he spent a week in Opotiki recently looking at old pa sites, seeing carvings and meeting-houses and making photographic and written records of sites and artifacts.

He had spent much of his time with Mr H. G. D. White, of Paerata Ridge, on whose farm an ancient site is being excavated by the Opotiki Historical Society. He said this site "quite excited" him and it was one of the pivotal sites in New Zealand history.

Of the tremendous amount of historical research and recording Mr White has done in this district, Mr Simmons said probably the most important was on this midden site, which he judged to date back to the first 400 years of New Zealand pre-history.

It held examples of the evolution of tools known in the South Island but, apart from a few surface finds in Hawkes Bay, had produced no evidence of similar development in the North Island he said.