

MAORIS WON'T GIVE UP OLD CARVINGS

Herald Correspondent

Opotiki

The Whakatohea tribe is making a determined effort to retain a fine collection of carvings from a dismantled meeting house, even to the extent of seeking police intervention.

The carvings once formed part of the Tanewhirinaki meeting house, at one time used by Te Kouti as a Rangatira church near Opotiki. When the building deteriorated it was dismantled and plans were made for a new meeting house. This would incorporate the carvings from the previous building.

The framework of the new meeting house had just been completed when it was blown down in a strong wind.

Meanwhile the carvings were stored in a shed, where they have remained since 1940 until being spirited away this week.

Tapu prevented a renewed attempt to build another meeting house, although there was periodic talk of doing so.

Finally the Tanewhirinaki meeting house committee, constituted through the Maori Land Court, decided to go ahead.

The carvings were recently inspected by Mr D. R. Simmons, ethnologist at the Auckland War Memorial Museum. Mr Simmons offered to treat and preserve them.

It was then learned that a tribal elder had offered the carvings to Canterbury Museum.

When this became known, the Opotiki Historical Society urged the retention of the carvings in the district. Then followed a meeting of the Whakatohea tribe this week when it was decided that the carvings should not leave the district.

The next day, Wednesday, the carvings disappeared from the place where they had been kept on the Watoeka marae. A Whakatohea elder said he had hidden them but refused to say where.

A search uncovered the carvings in a locked building. The police were called in and impounded the carvings.

THE TANEWHIRINAKI CARVINGS TO STAY IN OPOTIKI

Already \$2000 In Building Fund

The Tanewhirinaki carvings are not to leave this district. This was the resolution of a crowded meeting of the Whakatohea people at Terere Pa yesterday.

The meeting was called by tribal elder, Mr W. Maxwell, after an approach by the Opotiki Historical Society expressing concern at a move to have the carvings taken to Canterbury Museum.

The society also contacted local authorities and service clubs in the district, asking for their support in the preservation of the carvings, for and in Opotiki.

At present they are lying in the ruins of an iron shed, overgrown with fern and blackberry and rapidly deteriorating on the Watoeka marae. They originally formed part of a Rangatira church at the pa and are believed to pre-date the Te Kooti era.

REBUILD

It is, of course, hoped to rebuild the meeting-house, but the most important aim at present is the preservation of the very fine carvings, heritage and treasure of the

Whakatohea and, indeed, of the whole district. An offer of preservation has already been made by the Auckland Museum. After this work has been done suitable storage will have to be found until the building can be done.

Already the Whakatohea have \$2000 set aside for this work, but even with a hoped-for subsidy much more money will be needed for a building worthy of the Tanewhirinaki carvings.

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COMPLETED

RIDGE POLE

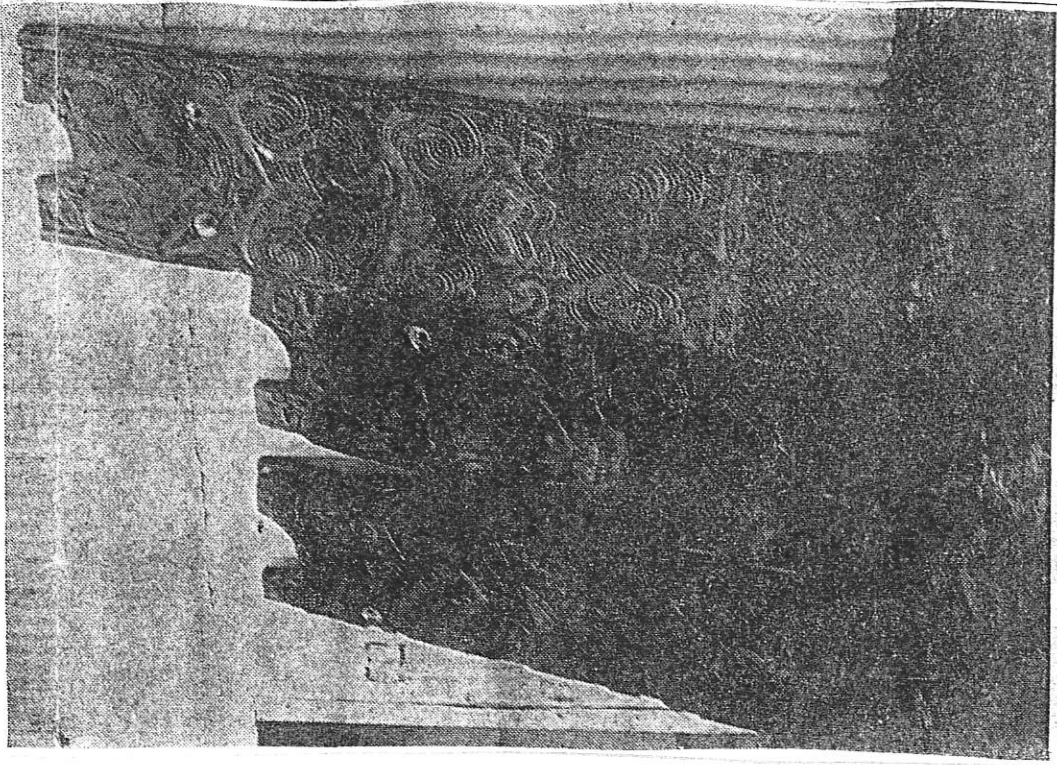
The ridge pole of the Tane-whirinaki meeting-house was left on the Waioeka marae when the carvings from there were brought into Opoiki. It is of the third era of carvings, when preparations were being made about 40 years ago to build a third meeting-house to incorporate them, but it has an interesting story of its own.

This huge piece of timber, more than 50 feet long and weighing about three tons, was felled in the Waioeka bush and shaped where it fell.

To transport it from there to Waioeka pa it had to cross the river and be hauled from the water up a 30-foot rock face to the road. The about 50 men who dragged the pole to the river were unable to handle it up the cliff and, had it not been for the ingenuity of Mr Taiipo Kelly, of Waiaua, who constructed the complicated Burton's purchase with pulleys and rope, it may never have reached its destination. With this, every man available and Mr Paki Withers' car, the great log reached the road and the back of a truck driven by Mr L. A. Abbot.

With considerable difficulty in negotiating the sharp bends in the road, it finally reached the pa, where the people were waiting to give a ceremonial welcome.

It is not known whether the ridge pole was actually in place when the great wind arose which blew down the framework of the third house shortly after it was erected. Since then both it and the carvings have lain on the marae until the carvings were moved from their inadequate shelter last March.



Above, more panels, after treatment. The larger is from the original period and the newer three-foot section at the base can be plainly seen.



Mr White applying preservative to one of the wall panels.

Tanewhirinaki Carvings

CLEANING AND INITIAL WORK OF PRESERVATION COMPLETED

The initial cleaning and preservation of the Tanewhirinaki carvings, which were recently brought into Opotiki from their storage place on the Waioeka marae, has been completed. The 138 catalogued pieces are being stored until the Whakatohea tribal committee has made a decision on their future.

Mr H. G. White, president of the Opotiki Historical Society, has used his considerable knowledge and skill in organising the work, and personally undertaking the greater part of it. Assisted for much of the time by Mr W. R. McCarty and for shorter periods by a number of others, both Maori and European, he has spent 16 days on the preservation.

The carvings are of three periods. Those of the original meeting-house, which are of totara and many of them in very good condition; some carved for the first rebuilding of the house, of rimu which has, in several cases deteriorated badly; others prepared for a third house which was never built. In these both totara and rimu were used and they are in good condition. Kahikatea has also been used for some of the finely carved figures.

THREE PERIODS

Dr D. R. Simmons, ethnologist of the Auckland Museum, said after examining the carvings in Opotiki: "The house itself is a very important documentation of the various periods in the history of carving and house building, from the small, rather low original house to the last period when the poupou (wall pieces) were raised by three feet."

Most of the carvings are from the original period and are of the finest work, although some of the most recent carving is very good. Most of the original rafters are in good condition and these have retained much of the pink, black, white and red paint, whereas the newer ones are unpainted. The oldest are carved on the curve, a

difficult task, where they had to support the thatched roof.

Many of the original poupou have newer carved panels on the base and small strips at each side where they were enlarged for incorporation in the second and larger house. Several of the newest pieces

are white, painted only with primer.

Naturally each piece has been very carefully cleaned, a painstaking task with dirt having to be picked from the intricate carving with a home-made wooden tool.

PVA GLUE

After this each piece has been painted with a preparation of PVA glue which rapidly permeates cracks and soft places, killing any borers and bonding soft and rotted timber. After half an hour this must be washed off as it would leave a varnish type finish if allowed to dry on the carvings. This preparation, which has been used for similar purposes by the British Museum staff for 25 years, has the advantage of never becoming brittle.

Mr White emphasised that the treatment he has given the carvings is "first aid," so that they may be handled — albeit still with great care — when they have to be moved again.