New Zealand Research: Maori

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NEW ZEALAND RESEARCH:
MAORI

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The Coming of the Maori

It was between 950 and 1400 BC that a group of people from the Americas built ships and sailed across the Pacific Ocean. It is known from legends and stories that their travels took them to some of the Pacific Islands. For instance, in Rarotonga they have a story of the seven stones placed by the shores of the lagoon in Ngatangiia that represent the seven canoes that left from those shores in ancient days. They traveled to New Zealand in canoes, arriving at many places on the East and West coasts. The trip was difficult, but they arrived with a great knowledge of their ancestors, having been taught somewhat in the language of their forefathers. The Maori people were taught to memorize their ancestry from father Adam down to themselves, which allowed them to know who they were and where they came from. The Maori people believe that they were led by their God because of their immense faith.

Some of the more well-known canoes that came to New Zealand are:

- Aotea
- Takitimu
- Mataatua
- Tainui
- Kurahaupo
- Te Arawa
- Horouta
- Nuketere
- Tokomaru
- Mamari
- Mahuhu

These are just a few of the many canoes that came to New Zealand and to Chatham Island, which is located off the east coast of the South Island. It is told that the Moriori people, who are a race of people that were in New Zealand when the Maori arrived, came to New Zealand at a much earlier time. They settled on Chatham Island and parts of the South Island. From the many canoes came different Tribes and Hapu (subtribes).

Some of the better-known Tribes include:

- Ngati-Tuwharetoa
- Ngati-Kahungunu
- Ngati-Awa
- Ngapuhi
- Ngati-Porou
- Ngati-Toi
- Ngati-Maniapoto
- Tainui
- Whanau-Apanui
• Ngere Raumati
• Ngai Tahu
• Ngati Whatua.

Some of the subtribes or Hapu are:
• Ngati-Kuri
• Ngati-Kahu
• Ngati-Hikihiki
• Ngati-Hine
• Ngati-Pou
• Ngati-Whatua
• Ngati-Hine
• Ngati-Wai
• Ngati-Matu

It is very important to know the Canoe, Tribe, and Hapu of the family before beginning research. This will assure that the correct research is being done.

The Lineage

Historically, the Maori people taught the eldest son the names of the family ancestors. If the eldest son was unable to fulfill his duties, the names were taught to the son who was found to be most capable. The young man would be taught to Tatai (recite) in a special Whare (house) called the Whare Wananga (House of Learning). This house was considered by the Maori people to be a very Tapu (sacred) place. This is where the young man would be instructed in the memorization of his Whakapapa (genealogy) by the Kaumatua (older men). As late as the 1970s, there were still some Kaumatua who could Tatai their Whakapapa as far back as Adam. When the Whakapapa is recited, the Tatai will begin at Adam and follow the line of succession until the individual who is reciting reaches himself.

A Tatai is a recited family line or lineage of descendants from a Canoe Chief or a Tribal Chief down to the person reciting. The following example is part of a family genealogy going down from a tribal chief to an ancestor nearer to the author.

RAHIRI
↓
UENUKU KUARE
↓
MAIKUKU
↓
TE RONGARE
↓
HINEAMARU
↓
PERA
Carving

The carver in a tribe would carve the lineage using wood from trees found in the local forest. This was a special event because the people respected the trees of the forest, so a Karakia (prayer) was always said before a tree was cut down.

It was not uncommon to find the Whakapapa of a family carved on a pole in their Wharenui (meeting house), which is a building on the Marae (gathering place) where people would meet or gather together for meetings. This meant that the people who attended the Hui (gathering) would sleep by the pole where their Whakapapa was carved. Each Wharenui would have a carved wooden statue on the roof outside the entrance. This statue would be a tribal ancestor of the area where the Wharenui was erected. This can be a great source of research for family who belong to the Marae.

The Kaumatua of the family usually had in his possession a wooden Tokotoko stick (walking stick), which he used when speaking to the people who gathered on the Marae for a Hui. This stick would have the names of the Whakapapa that goes back to the wooden statue, or perhaps just part of the descendants or some of his family carved on it. A Kaumatua or an older person in the family who has the Tokotoko can help locate the names of individuals on a particular Whakapapa.

Waiatas and Chants

Whakapapa books have songs written in them, providing information in the form of Waiatas (songs) and chants. The Ancient Maori sang these songs about their ancestors and in them mention their names and sometimes some history about them. The researcher can often find clues in the words in a Waiata. A chant is a song that is sung in just a few notes and takes much longer to give. Both Waiata and chants will provide the researcher with information about the culture through music and spoken word.

Legends

Maori people are known for having an extensive knowledge of their ancestry, and there are many legends that get handed down orally. Some legends contain information about families, while others speak of Tribes and Tribal Customs, their Chiefs, wars, and the coming of “the White Man” (Pakeha).
One well-known Maori legend explains who they are as a people and where they come from. This history has been passed orally from one generation to the next. The belief is that they came from two large landmasses that were joined by an isthmus. They believe that they came from Hawaiiki, which is the name of the place that the Maori claim to have come from. No one really knows where that place is, because there are a lot of different versions.

There is a Maori phrase that states this belief: “Tawhiti nui, Tawhiti roa, Tawhiti pamamao, I-Te Hono-I-wai rua.”

- Tawhiti-nui means a far distant place.
- Tawhiti-roa means a longer distant place—
- Tawhiti Pamamao, means a far greater distance and
- I-Te Hono-I-Wairua, means The joining of man to the Spirit World

**Stories**

The older people (Kaumatua and Kuia) tell interesting stories that provide an untold wealth of information to the listener. It is useful to listen carefully to what is being said, because the stories might contain information regarding which canoes certain individuals were on and other information that helps further the search for genealogical information. The different stories of the lives and loves of the Maori people are fascinating and beautiful. They believe that history needs to be written down in a Book of Remembrance for future generations, so those that come later can be proud of their heritage. The Books of Remembrance will have a description of the ancestor and what happened.

**Beginning Research**

To begin research, it is a good idea to speak first with immediate family, usually with the Kaumatua and Kuia within a family, because they have a wealth of knowledge that is rarely available anywhere else. They are a valuable resource, and it is best not to leave this sort of research until the last minute, because it will not always be available.

**1. Records Found in the Home**

There are many records that can give clues to help further research. Some records that might be found in the home are:

1. Christening records
2. Family Bibles: possibly with names and dates regarding births and marriages.
3. Documents: wills
4. Letters: either from family members or friends
5. Books with Whakapapa and histories written in them
6. Pieces of paper that older members of the family have taken notes on or have written Whakapapa lines on.
7. Civil records: Original birth, marriage and death certificates
8. Photos: sometimes these have names and other information on the back
9. Maori Land Schedules: Maori Land Court schedules have lists of names of the people who are shareholders of a block of land and in some cases will include the ages of the persons entitled to possession such as: fa (Female adult) or ma (Male adult) or just eight years or sixteen years—or whatever the person’s age was at the time the court hearing was held. The name of the block of land and the date of the court will be on the first page of the schedule.
10. Family graves are often on the land near the home, especially if they lived in a rural area.

2. Kaumatua and Kuia
When a Kaumatua or a Kuia gives information, he or she will sometimes prefer that the Whakapapa is not written down; usually this is because it is expected to be memorized. The best way to memorize the information is to return and visit the Kaumatua or Kuia often. Some will be happy to allow for note taking and maybe the use of a small tape recorder, but it is important to ask regarding these two items before beginning. It is essential to respect the individual that is sharing the information and adhere to any traditions they may have.

3. Relatives
It is better to not bombard older members of a Whanau (family) such as aunts, uncles, and cousins with lots of questions. It is best to sit quietly with them and talk about their lives, putting the focus on them and not the information that is desired. This allows them to share information when they feel comfortable doing so. It is vital to inform the Kaumatua or Kuia that none of the information they share will be used in a negative or disrespectful way. It is sometimes better to have someone in the family who is not too young; ideally, the interviewer should be an adult, because the Kaumatua or Kuia might not feel comfortable sharing the information with a young person if they feel that the Whakapapa will not be respected or used for the right purposes.

The same research rules apply when sending letters to relatives. The letter should be about the person who is to receive the letter and should not just ask for information. The best way to get information is to make a general comment about the ancestor whom you are seeking, such as “I was wondering which school he/she attended and if it still exists” in order to allow the letter receiver to give the information in the reply. Before beginning, it is best for researchers to check their own homes to collect any information that is available there, so that they are better aware of what to ask those whom they speak with later. This will save a lot of unnecessary expense, time, and frustration. Relatives are one of the best resources when it comes to research, because not only can they share necessary information but they can provide the researcher with stories and histories which help to make those who are being researched part of a family rather than just names on a page.

Record Sources
After getting all the information that is available nearby, the next step is to go to the localities where the ancestors lived; in each area there will be different sources depending on what is available. It is best to check with those who live in the district regarding whom to contact to get information about a certain family in the vicinity.

1. Cemeteries
Almost all Maori people erect headstones on family graves about a year after the burial date of the person. These headstones sometimes have the birth date, tribe, and names of parents and children inscribed, along with a picture of the person. Headstone information, though not always reliable, can be a guide to further research. Please remember that Maori cemeteries are very Tapu (sacred) and permission is needed before entering the graveyard. Those living in the area can usually help guide the researcher in following the traditions of the cemetery. For instance, some cemeteries have certain days of the week when one can visit, among other traditions. It is important to abide by the wishes of the local people and adhere to local tradition as a sign of respect.
Do not forget that some burials took place on the land where the ancestors once lived. These graves may not have headstones, but the family living on the land and families who now live in the area will know about them. They are usually fenced in by a white paling fence, which in New Zealand is a fence made of thin slabs of timber that are pointed on the top end and painted white. Some Maori cemeteries in New Zealand have had the headstones transcribed and are accessible at many LDS family history centers.

2. History of Maori Land Court Records

Between 1840 and 1862, the government kept indexes and registers of some inward correspondence that was dealt with by the Native Department (later called Maori Affairs Department). These indexes and registers are now available at the National Archives in Wellington, New Zealand. In 1862, the New Zealand government changed the Native Land Act, so that the courts decided who rightfully owned blocks of tribal land and issued certificates of title. Then in 1865, another act was passed that set up Native Land Courts, which were absorbed into the justice department between 1893 and 1906. These courts later became known as Maori Land Courts. When this took place, the Kaumatua appeared in court along with members of the family to claim possession of their ancestors’ land. The claim was usually made by reciting the Whakapapa, which was written down in the minute book by the clerk of the court under the supervision of the judge who was in charge of the proceedings. All Maori Land Courts have in their archives minute books that contain records of court sessions dealing with particular land blocks. All the original books are held at the Maori Land Courts. Each district has its own records, and some of the records have been microfilmed. The National Archives, now known as Archives New Zealand, has at its head office in Wellington a large collection of Maori Land Court Minute Books on microfilm. All the minute books for all of the New Zealand Land Courts have been filmed. These films are available through family history centers, or they can be ordered from the Family History Library.

Some Research Guides:

New Zealand Land Court Department:

Maori Land court records of all Maori affairs and land affairs were kept and are available for research purposes in the districts below.

The Districts throughout New Zealand are:

- Taitokerau – Whangarei Land Court Office
- Maniapoto – Hamilton Office
- Waiariki - Rotorua Office
- Tairawhiti – Gisborne Office
- Aotea – Wanganui Office
- Takitimu – Hastings Office
- Te Waipounamu (This includes Stewart and Chatham Islands) – Christchurch Office

1. Most land courts prefer that customers go into the district offices themselves to do research, because the staff does not have the time. Research may be done in original books, papers, and films.

2. In some district courts, the records are available on computer.

3. The records are not usually listed under tribal areas.

Other records that will be helpful in research, such as adoption records and application files, might be accessible at some district courts. There are also probates and letters of administration, and
succession orders. The best way to check for these other records is by asking the staff, who are very helpful in finding records. Maori Trust Boards and other Iwi organizations (organizations that families or tribes or subtribes set up) will sometimes have copies of records relating to their tribal lands, so this is also a good place to check for information.

To be able to do any searches in the minute books, one would need to know the following:
1. The names of the person who inherited the block of land.
2. The name of the block or blocks of land the ancestor owned.
3. A chronology of owners of the land is very helpful but is not a necessity.
4. An approximate death date.
5. Most indexes list persons alphabetically by first given name or by a name the person has been given by another tribe. This is quite common in older people and many have several given names. Maori Land Court records are an excellent source for research of ancestry and should be used, but as with anything else, it is very important to check the information to make sure it is accurate.

3. Whakapapa Books

In the early 1900s, many of the Kaumatua traveled around New Zealand visiting other older people, gathering genealogies from those who could Tatai. They spent many days korero (talking) together about their ancestors. Usually a scribe accompanied them to write what was being said as they recited their oral genealogies. This was done because the older people felt the necessity to have family genealogies written to preserve the records for future generations. This is how Whakapapa Books came into being.

Today, many families have old, hard-covered books filled with Whakapapa and histories. However, not all the books have survived; many have been buried with the dead or burned by younger people at or after the burial of their ancestors. The Tapu of Whakapapa Books was not always understood by younger generations; hence, they would be afraid of the consequences and destroy the books, making it difficult for some families to find their ancestors. These Whakapapa books, though owned by a particular Kaumatua or family, do not have just one family’s genealogy in them, but multiple families. This is because when they met together at a Hui in a Wharenui on a Marae or in various homes around the country, the genealogies were written of all those who gave a Tatai. The Kaumatua were not the only people who helped collect Whakapapa; there were many foreigners who helped with the project. Some of those that helped collect the Whakapapa were:

- Stuart Meha
- Te Ao Wilson
- Hohepa
- George Watene
- Taranaki Tarau
- Martin Pohatu
- Rangi Davies
- W. Naera
- Elder William Cole
- Elder Jensen
- Elder Wadoups

These individuals and others like them have done a great service not only to researchers but also to the families who have had their Whakapapa preserved because of these efforts.

Whakapapa can never be completely dependable, because they are passed down orally. Hence,
the more books available with a family’s genealogy, the better. More books will help create records that are as accurate as possible.

4. Some Tips on Distinguishing Male and Female

Genealogies of the New Zealand Maori do not always indicate the gender of the person named.
1. Legends can be helpful for distinguishing if one knows and understands the legend; ask Kaumatua and Kuia for help.
2. A male or a female ancestor could have the same name: Toma or Hikihiki are examples of names that can be either male or female.
3. Often, a Waiata can help determine gender of the ancestor. Strong words in the song tell that a person is a male, while sweet, flowing words can indicate a female name. For example, words like Rakau mean tree, so where this word is used as part of a name it would probably be a male name. A female name may include the word Ra meaning day or sun. Adding Ihi to Ra makes Ra-ihi, meaning “the early sun’s rise in the sky.” Usually the researcher needs either to have knowledge of the Maori language or help from a Kaumatua or Kuia to distinguish the gender of an ancestor.
4. Even some authorities and scholars in Whakapapa may disagree about the genders of certain names. This does not mean that the average person is incorrect when making a decision regarding gender.

5. Maori School Records

There are many Maori schools throughout New Zealand, some from before 1879 when the Department of Education took control from the Native Department. Some early settlements in New Zealand organized small schools; later, both Maori and early settler children from Britain and other countries attended the local schools. School records are very reliable. They contain the English names given to many Maori children because the teachers could not pronounce the children’s Maori names. These records may help families compile all names that ancestors were known by.

Many schools in rural areas have been closed down and many buildings demolished. These school enrollment books can usually be found in family homes or local museums. To locate these records:
1. Archives New Zealand has a regional office in Auckland with many of the records that are available. Contact the Auckland Regional Office.
2. Inquire in the district among older people.
3. Offices of the education department hold many of the original books. Some schools may still have the records—it is good to ask!
4. Some books have been microfilmed. To see if a particular school has been microfilmed, look it up at an LDS family history center or look on http://www.familysearch.org.

6. Religious Records

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has been keeping church membership records in New Zealand since the 1860s. If an ancestor was a member, there will be church records that contain good information. Some of these records have been microfilmed and are available at LDS family history centers. If there is a question about whether someone was a member, it is best to check with older family members; they will have more information involving family religions.

Clergy of different religions such as the Church of England, Wesleyan Methodist, Catholic, and
others from England began to arrive in the northern part of the North Island as early as 1813 and had soon traveled throughout the country. The Maori people believed what they were told by the men in the white shirts with the collars turned backward. They were told that they needed to be baptized and married; although they did not fully understand what “the White Man” said, they agreed to do as they were taught. According to their customs, their marriages were legal regardless of whether they had been married by the church, as long as they were married by Tribal Law. In compiling Whakapapa, the tribal record is considered the marriage date. The language barrier caused a number of problems with parish records; the main problem is that there are several parish records recording the same event. For example, an individual may have been married to the same person several times by different religions, because the Maori people did not understand that they did not need to repeat the ordinances. Therefore, these records are an important source. Most church records contain information involving christenings, marriages, and burials.

Available Parish Records

Church of England (Anglican) records are available from 1813 to the present day. These records are held at the following places:

- Auckland Parishes—the records for north of the North Island from Spirits Bay to Franklin County, in the south of Auckland are held at the Auckland Diocesan Office.
- Hamilton-Taranaki Parishes—at the Diocesan Office in Hamilton.
- Tolago Bay-Waiupu Parishes—some are held at the Anglican church at Tolaga Bay, and other places on the east coast.
- Waimate North Parish—these records are at Kaikohe Public Library and other libraries.

All other Church of England records are held in the church’s head office in New Zealand. It would be best to check in the area that is being researched to see what is available.

Other churches that hold early New Zealand parish records are:

- Wesleyan Methodist Church
- Catholic Church
- London Missionary Society

Most of the main offices of the different churches in New Zealand will help look up records, but most will charge a fee to do this. However, these records are an excellent way to trace information.

7. Census Records

There are some early Maori census records in New Zealand that have family information. Census records today are destroyed after a few years and do not hold information that could be used as a source for research. The early ones that are available are located in some libraries; always ask about them.

8. Maori Registration

Compulsory registration for Maori people in New Zealand began in 1911. Of course, not many registrations happened among Maori people until 1914–1918 during the Great War period. Some Maori people registered false birthdates for men during this period of time to enable those who wished to qualify to enter the Armed Forces. It was not until about 1935, when new legislation came into Parliament, that people started registering children at birth and having legal marriage performed instead of being married by Tribal Law, so registrations between 1935 and 1961 are more complete and very helpful. The compulsory registration records give information regarding
an individual’s Tribe or subtribe and sometimes parental information and Mokopuna (grandchildren) names. Later in the 1960s, all records were standardized and combined in one filing system. Under this system, all records have the same information and are in the same format. All the district registrar’s records were sent in to the registrar general and now all records for New Zealand births, marriages, and deaths are at the registrar general’s office in Wellington.

9. Public Libraries

Public libraries are another great source of information regarding New Zealand research. There are many resources in all public libraries throughout New Zealand. Extensive lists of books, Whakapapa, and other items exist in their collections. It is best to check with the libraries in a particular area to see what resources are available, which might include books of histories of the early Maori Tribes. There are also books that are written about individual cities, towns, districts, and villages that will help provide information for further research. Some libraries have original records, microfilms, and microfiche of many of the records. Some hold shipping lists, naturalization papers, Maori index cards and other research material that will be helpful.

Comments

This article was written to teach researchers about Maori records and where to obtain information to compile a Whakapapa that will be as correct as possible, remembering, of course, that Maori records were passed down only orally until the 1860s. There might be discrepancies between Whakapapa, but that does not mean that either person is incorrect; it is simply another version. Thoroughly researching a family makes it easier to compile a record that is as correct as possible.

Try to collect stories that are will help the generations yet to come to know their ancestors: their lives; their mistakes; things of good report; the way they disciplined their children; the clothing they wore; the food they ate, such as the different Kai Moana (sea food); and life on the Marae. Life on a Marae was very different from that of the Europeans. For instance, disciplining children was a personal responsibility, and they valued cleanliness. The only way to obtain genealogical information is to talk to relatives and search books and other available resources.

Glossary

Hapu: subtribe
Hui: gathering of people
Kai Moana: seafood
Karakia: prayer
Kaumatua: adult or older person
Kuia: older woman
Korero: to speak
Marae: the courtyard of the meetinghouse (an open space)
Mokopuna: grandchild
Tatai: lineage or to recite a lineage
Tapu: sacred
Tokotoko: walking stick
Tupuna: grandparent or ancestor
Waiata: song
Whakapapa: genealogies
**Whanau:** family or families
**Whare:** house
**Wharenui:** meeting house
**Whare Wananga:** house of learning