

# TE PAE TAWHITI

THE DISTANT HORIZON

**Morikau Station – 100 years**

Penny Robinson

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Morikaunui Incorporation wishes to thank the following for their support of the 100 Years of farming on Morikau Station celebrations: Atihau-Whanganui Incorporation; Te Atihau Trust; Balance Chartered Accountants; Māori Trustee; Bank of New Zealand; Ballance AgriNutrients Ltd; Taihape Veterinary Services Ltd; Carston Contracting Ltd; Tohu Wines; Kono New Zealand; PGG Wrightsons; Farmlands; AgITO.

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*‘Te Pae Tawhiti’ refers to the ‘distant’ or ‘long’ horizon. It is taken from a proverb emphasised by Te Rangitakuku Metekingi during his term on the NZ Business Planning Council. The full version is “Whaia te pae tawhiti kia tata, whaia te pae tata whakamaia kia tina.” “Pursue the vision of the distant horizon, by achieving the goals at hand.”*

## DISCLAIMER

This publication is a condensed version of the life on Morikau Station and provides a flavour of events that have occurred over the past 100 years. There are many more stories to tell and each person will have their own variation. I trust you will enjoy those encapsulated here and use them as a springboard to share your own memories with others.

**Penny Robinson**  
Whanganui May 2011

## HE MIHI / FOREWORD

Tākiri ana te pūao o te rau tau hou ko  
runga ko Ruapehu.

Ka tangi ko te kōkako,

Tuia, tuia, huia, huia,

Tuia te morehu whenua,

Huia te morehu tāngata,

Ka rongo te pō, ka rongo te ao.

Tēnei te toki haratua nā te ara kupu matua,

Te mori kau tonu nei i te pae whenua hā

kui, hā koro mā Akina e te whakatauākī nā

Pāmu, “Toitū te kupu, toitū te mana, toitū  
te whenua.”

Ko ngā kōrero e whai ake nei, he puna  
mahara mō rātau I hauroatia te maru o te  
kaupapa ahuwheūa o Morikau.

E Tia mā, kua eke tātau ki te pae tawhiti o  
te kotahi rau tau,

Tēnā, me pūpuru tātau ki ngā kupu  
tohutohu o nehe, kia wawe ai te kōkiri  
whakamua.

Inā te kupu nā Te Rangitakuku Metekingi:  
“He ao āpōpō, he ao te a.”

*“The dawn of a new century breaks  
upon Ruapehu,*

*The kokako resounds,*

*Unite, unite, join forth,*

*Unite the remnant lands,*

*Unite the descendant survivors,*

*Herald the night, herald the day.*

*‘Tis the shaping adze of the absolute pathway,*

*That continues to foster the land of our ancestors*

*Inspired by the proverbial wisdom of Pāmu,*

*“The permanence of language, prestige  
and land.”*

*The narrative that follows is a pool of memory  
dedicated to those who have been responsible for the  
survival of Morikau Farm.*

*Oh sires all, we have attained the goal of one hundred  
years of existence.*

*Therefore, let us retain the wisdom teachings  
of the past, that they may accelerate our  
progress into the future.*

*Such are the words of Te Rangitakuku  
Metekingi: “Tomorrow holds a future of  
revelation and prosperity.”*

**Turama Hawira**

## TE KŌMITI MĀTAHI – FIRST COMMITTEE



*The first (1957 – 58) Committee of Management for the Morikau Incorporated Block was, from left, back row, Messrs H Amohia, S Arahanga, W Pohe, R Tapa, J Liddell (Manager), H K Hipango. Front row, Messrs R Robson (Secretary), W R Metekingi (Chairman), Miss Hera Scott, Mr I L Robson (Secretary). Mr Amohia retired in 1976 and was replaced by Mr Noel E Bates. Miss Scott, later Mrs Wells, retired in 1969. She had served on the old Morikau Farm Advisory Committee, and been its chair, the only woman to do so. Planning for eventual incorporation was done at her home, where the late Sir Apirana Ngata had said that the people would need to prepare for the day when Morikau Farm would have to be incorporated. Mrs Wells died in 1973. Incorporation Collection*

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Atihau-Whanganui Incorporation and Te Ati Hau Trust congratulate Morikau Station on its 100 Years of farming and are proud to support the celebrations.



## TE TAUIHU – INTRODUCTION



*Morikau Farm. Roke family collection*

Throughout its history, the Morikau Station's ability to flourish has been attributed, in part, to containing some of the best land on the river. It includes a considerable amount of easy to moderate hill country, largely volcanic and young sedimentary, but prone to erosion with a thin layer of top soil. The property was early assessed as being suitable for raising both sheep and cattle. Farming on the property and in the surrounding area has included dairying, sheep and beef cattle breeding and fattening, and some cropping, mostly as fodder for use locally.

Morikau Station encompasses 4952 ha (12,000 acres) with close to 1820 ha (4500 acres) of native bush in reserve under the Nga Whenua Rahui voluntary scheme. In 2011, the effective grassed area is almost 2400 ha (5800 acres). The balance includes 57 ha (140 acres) in pine plantings and just over 2500 ha (6000 acres) in native bush, scrub, gorse and blackberry, and stretches from Hiruharama (Jerusalem) to Ranana (London) on the Whanganui Awa. It is a drive of about 50 minutes

along a mostly tar-sealed road. The main property is reached via the Morikau Rd, just south of Ranana, while the Mokonui side is accessed via the Mokonui Rd a little further south, but north of Matahiwi. Early access from Raeithi and Whanganui town was overland, or by river from Whanganui.

Despite the challenges of farming at Morikau – isolation, multiple ownership, management by committee, the prevalence of noxious weeds, and the unstable nature of the land – the property is a well-established sheep and beef breeding block, finishing a large proportion of lambs and selling young cattle. Sheep provide the main source of income with cattle contributing additional income and assisting in maintaining pasture quality. Around 17,500 sheep and 1,800 cattle are carried through the winter.



*The named paddocks.* Incorporation Collection



## TE OROKOHANGA – BEGINNINGS

*Te mōrehu whenua, te mōrehu tangata / The remnants of the land, the remains of the people. Taitoko Te Rangihwinui, 1897<sup>12</sup>*

Before Morikau Farm came into being as a large, managed farm in 1910, alienation of Maori land had been recognised as a major dilemma for iwi. As a result, legal and political action was being sought throughout Aotearoa New Zealand to try to resolve the situation. This had begun with the settlement of Aotearoa New Zealand by Europeans, particularly the British, who brought a different approach to land occupation and use. It little mattered, probably did not even occur, to those Europeans settling in Aotearoa New Zealand, that their ancestors might have had similar experiences to those they were imposing on the indigenous New Zealanders, with land taken over by invaders, or earning only a meagre living as a tenant farmer or farm labourer.

In these long narrow islands far across the oceans from their homelands, the incomers saw opportunities unattainable in their lands of origin with the prospect of purchasing, breaking in and farming land they could regard as their own. Overlooking or not understanding the indigenous people's concepts of kaitiakitanga<sup>3</sup> and land use, the settlers and their politicians viewed the land as empty, available, and ideal for fulfilling their dreams. What they did not acknowledge was that such different approaches could lead to immense inequities, many taking decades to resolve, others still unresolved. Fortunately for Morikau and its Māori owners, steps were taken early enough to keep at least this much land in indigenous ownership.

Prior to the establishment of Morikau Farm, a range of political actions had been taken relating to the indigenous occupiers and the incoming settlers. Before 1840, and the signing of Te Tiriti o Waitangi/ the Treaty of Waitangi, land was sold indiscriminately to Europeans. Te Tiriti halted the process and by 1862, the Native Land Act was passed. This enabled the establishment of Courts to determine and name the owners of blocks of Māori Land. The Native Lands Act 1865 followed and established a Native Land Court. It has been suggested that this

Act had a dual purpose, one being to make more Māori land available to settlers, and the other being to encourage Māori to assimilate by weakening their connections to iwi, hapū and whānau. The problem was exacerbated by extensive Crown purchasing of Māori land, resulting in loss of direct Māori control.

As highlighted above with the comment by Te Rangihwinui in 1897, by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Māori had become aware of the problems involved in the sale of land to the European, the difference in approach to land use, and the Europeans' sense of ownership which meant no others had the right to enter or use the land. Many were also determined to retain as much of their land as possible and to manage it without interference. Large numbers of Māori raised their concerns at various hui held in the North Island, with local voices added at a hui held at Putiki Marae in 1897, attended by the Native Minister, Sir James Carroll. Māori then petitioned Parliament urging the Crown to stop buying Native lands, and asking that representative Māori as councils, boards or committees be authorized to operate their own holdings.

Three years after the 1897 hui at Putiki, the 1900 Māori Lands Administration Act was introduced. This gave Māori considerable voice on the then established Māori Land Councils, with strong representation incorporated in the legislation. Of the 1900 Act, Tinirau (1993:9) noted, 'It was the first of several Acts which provided for the vesting of lands. The Act established Māori-dominated Land Councils where Māori land could be vested by owners for leasing'. (It appears that) 'the Aotea Māori Land district was the only region where this Act was substantially used (with about) 91,000 acres...vested voluntarily in the council by Māori owners, including the Morikau 2 block'. Morikau 2 was later transferred to Te Atihau-Whanganui Incorporation. The 1905 Māori Land Settlement Act and the 1906 Māori Land Settlement Act Amendment Act, and the establishment of Māori Land Boards, substantially reduced Māori representation on the Board and, consequently, weakened their control over their land.

With some Maori wanting to manage their own land, the genesis of Morikau Farm most likely dates from the Stout-Ngata Commission of

1907, with its establishment enabled by the passing of the Native Land Act 1909. The Commission was set up to study the question of Māori land and the operation of the Māori Land Boards. Under the 1865 Act, the Morikau Block had been surveyed, considered by the Native Land Court in 1899, and partitioned into two separate blocks, the 24,100 acres being designated Morikau 1 and Morikau 2. The Commission noted that Māori and European were engaging directly in leases involving large tracts of land in the Morikau area. This was not an option the Commission thought desirable, particularly if Māori were to learn to manage their own lands. The Commissioners believed it was important that Māori have complete involvement, rather than merely collecting rent, though not all Māori agreed. This contrasted with the desire at political level to find land suitable for European settlement but locally, quick legal and political action meant that by May, 1907 three blocks - Morikau 1 (7200 acres, compulsorily vested earlier), and the adjoining Ranana (3100 acres) and Ngarakauwhakarara (4955 acres) were in Board control.

The Morikau Station lands of Morikau 1, Ngarakauwhakarara and Ranana had been subject to alienation through the Maori Land Settlement Act 1906, which enabled Maori land to “be compulsorily vested in a Maori Land Board if there was a problem with noxious weeds or if the Minister felt the land was not properly occupied by Maori”. In spite of this, a representative meeting of owners held in 1908 proposed that the lands be incorporated and farmed.

Dissent continued between the Board and the Commission about how the land should be managed. With regard to Morikau 1, the Commission’s preference was that some of the land could be farmed as a unit, i.e. as a communal block, but, in general, Māori should farm their own blocks to gain practical, business and management skills. The Board argued that it was legally and financially constrained and therefore could not allow hapū groups control over their land, nor could the Board agree to partitioning the land. It recommended that the land be managed by one person.

The Native Land Act 1909 enabled Māori land boards to manage vested lands as a farm, and allowed the Board to appoint a manager

who would chair a Committee of Management elected by Māori owners. The farm's expenses were to be charged against the property. As noted above, Morikau 1, with 820 owners, had been vested in the Aotea Board. Following the enactment of the 1909 Act, the owners of Morikau 1 and the Board met in 1910 and agreed to the appointment of a farm manager. That farm management committee of owners, chaired by Judge J B Jack, met in Jerusalem and appointed Gregor McGregor as the first manager to take up the post on 23 August 1910. Six months later, in February 1911, two adjoining blocks, Ranana and Ngarakauwhakarara, were added to his responsibilities.



*View from the Station - Tongariro, Ngauruhoe & Ruapehu.* Morikaunui Incorporation Collection



*View from the Station - Taranaki.* Morikaunui Incorporation Collection

Parts of the Morikau 1 block formed the core of the farm. The owners of Ngarakauwhakarara and Ranana agreed to the inclusion of blocks: Morikau 1, Ngarakauwhakarara and Ranana - totalling 15,295 acres, from which 3,485 acres were allotted as papakainga and excluded, from the farm lands. Next, a committee was formed to have oversight over the land. Although still under the control of the Aotea Maori Land Board, it had some input and was able to keep the owners informed.

Challenges included the property's isolation, its multiple ownership, the prevalence of introduced plants, now noxious weeds, especially gorse and blackberry, and the unstable nature of the underlying land, which, when rains are heavy, is prone to slipping and flooding, leading to slumping of tracks and kilometres of deep, sticky mud.

Using an initial £18,000 mortgage, within a few years about 4,000 acres (1619 ha) were planted in grass and other crops. Hereford cattle were introduced and later developed into a Hereford stud. A woolshed, a manager's house, staff accommodation and other farm buildings were built using timber milled on the station. Many kilometres of fences had been erected and tracks were built to improve access. By the 1930s the farm had started returning a profit, the mortgage was repaid and the owners received a return on investment.

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## TE KAPOREIHANA – INCORPORATION

The 1940s was an era of governmental submissions, petitions and meetings by the owners who requested an investigation into the management of the farm, which was never granted. The owners were dissatisfied with the Land Board's administration. They wanted more control over the land and wanted to see the financial reports annually. In 1948, Hoeroa Marumaru, who was the chief spokesman during the meetings, advised the Acting Minister of Maori Affairs, the Rt Hon W. Nash, of the owners' wishes. Nash told them that incorporation into a legal entity would allow them to do this. Four more years of talks between Whanganui leaders, the Aotea Maori Land Board, and Government saw little progress on this matter. Before Mr Marumaru died in 1952, he had instructed that applications be written 'to divest the Maori Trustee of his title' and call the owners to meetings to decide whether they 'should form a joint incorporation to take over Morikau'. A meeting of a majority of owners in Putiki on 11 August 1953, unanimously agreed that the land be re-vested in the owners, be kept as one farm, and that the five blocks be amalgamated into one. An Order of Incorporation was made at the Maori Land Court in April 4 1955 to 'enable the land to be occupied and managed as a farm for the purpose of carrying on any agricultural or pastoral business'. The Maori Land Court then confirmed the first Morikaunui Incorporation (the entity then called the Morikaunui Incorporated Blocks) Committee of Management (CoM). It was the second Maori Incorporation to be formed and became a blueprint for many others around the country. In May, 1955, the farm was 'resumed by the Maori owners and a management committee appointed' though the Maori Affairs Department continued to do the administration.<sup>4</sup> The Committee of Management comprised the project's architect, Dr Rangi Metekingi (Chairman), Messrs George Hipango (Wellington), Hikaia Amohia, Whatarangi Pohe, Robert Tapa, Kamu te Arahanga and Mrs Hera Wells.<sup>5</sup> At the inaugural AGM in 1956 the shareholders agreed an expenditure of £15,000 (around \$700, 000 in current terms) for the building of the main woolshed and £3000 each (\$420,000 in total in current terms) as a donation to each of three local Marae, Ranana, Hiruharama and Pipiriki.

The station has been overseen since then by the Incorporation's Committee of Management. Liaison between the Farm Manager and the Committee has varied. Sometimes the Chairman has acted as the liaison between the Manager and the Committee. At other times, the Committee has appointed a farm supervisor to engage with the Manager. The Incorporation elects its Board annually, with many members serving for extended periods. First elected in 1997, Mr Jimmy Edmonds was the longest serving member in 2011. Other members of the 2011 Board were: Ms Hari Benevides (Chairman), Ann Waitai, William (Bill) Konui, Tema Butler, Turama Hawira, and Bob (Bobby) Gray.

The Incorporation also oversees The Whanganui Trust, set up in 1964, when the shareholders of Morikau voted for its establishment. The Trust's key object is 'the support of educational and social purposes.' Confirmed in 1965, it was the first Trust authorised to hold unclaimed dividends in trust relating to Maori land, and to use the interest earned for distribution for charitable purposes. Mr Alan Horsley, then the Incorporation's lawyer, recalled 'with admiration the perseverance of the Chairman, Rangi Mete Kingi, in wresting control of the unclaimed monies from the Crown'.<sup>6</sup>

From 1972, the Atihau Whanganui Incorporation engaged with the Trust, contributing towards scholarships. Atihau withdrew formally from the Whanganui Trust in 2008. The following year, the chairman, Ms Hari Benevides, reported 'that the Trust was granted its Charities Commission registration without any alteration being required to the original 1965 Trust Deed'.<sup>7</sup>

Shareholders in Morikau and their descendants are able to apply for grants and scholarships from the Trust. Up to four under-graduate scholarships are awarded annually. Every second year a Post-Graduate scholarship is usually awarded. Agri-business and Farm Training scholarships are also awarded. The named scholarships honour early board members, including founding chairman, Rangi Mete Kingi, Hera Scott Wells, and Hoeroa Marumaru, all instrumental in ensuring the Incorporation's establishment, continuation or evolution.





*Above: Challenges include steep country and noxious weeds.*

*Below: Morikau breeds and fattens beef cattle. Roke Family Collection*



*Romney sheep grazing. Morikaunui Incorporation Collection*

## TE NOHO TEIHANA – STATION LIFE

*“Morikau has a rich strain of soil that my father called “rubbly papa” which stretches east into the Rangitikei, through Fields’ Track, Mangamahu, the Turakina Valley and onto Taihape. ‘Rubbly papa’ promotes strong pasture growth.” Peter Cameron, 2011.*

Morikau has had many farm managers and several supervisors since its establishment in 1910. While each man had his own style, all were charged with improving the property and its production. Working with a Committee was not always easy, particularly when members had conflicting thoughts about best farming practice, or lacked farming knowledge. Despite some friction, the Farm Managers and the Committee usually found constructive ways of working together. Their mutual aim has always been to improve the land, enhance stock quality and so improve production and profit.

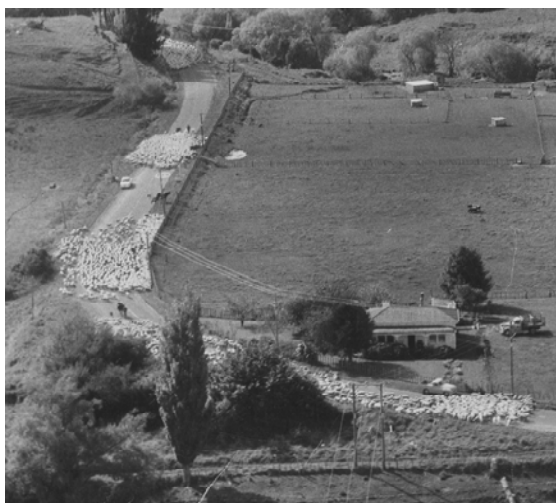
The manager’s tasks and challenges have remained much the same throughout the century. They have included planning and supervision, seeking new methods of increasing productivity, overseeing staff, improving stock quality, working with stock, developing and maintaining the fences, reducing the quantity of noxious weeds, especially gorse and blackberry, and liaising with the committee, either directly, via the chairman or through an appointed supervisor.

When the first manager, Gregor McGregor, took up the role, vast tracts of the property were still forested, while much of the other acreage was covered in noxious weeds, particularly blackberry and gorse. Even now, the battle continues with these and against feral pigs as well as the goats introduced in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Fencing the acreage has been another ongoing challenge. Initially fence posts and battens were milled at Morikau, but later electric fences were added for increased protection.

In the early days, supplies came upriver by steamer from Whanganui, while wool and other produce went out the same way. Sheep and cattle were driven across country to and from Whanganui, but later cattle were driven overland to Raetihi while sheep continued

downriver to the Imlay Freezing Works. Once the road went in, all stock was transported by road, with the station's last flock of sheep walked to the freezing works in Whanganui in 1961. From then on, stock was transported by truck to their destination.

Former shepherd and shearer, Rhody McGregor, recalled putting the first bulls on one of Thompson and Foley's green trucks. "We'd never seen a bull on a truck so it was pretty astounding the day the truck pulled up with what looked like an old wooden crate on the back. We got the bulls on and from that day on everything went down the river road to Whanganui," he said.



*The last sheep drive. Above: The mob entering Upokongaro. Below: From the old Whanganui Town Bridge, the mob is about to enter the Taupo Quay – Victoria Avenue intersection. Roke Family Collection*



When Gregor McGregor accepted the position of manager he had a huge task ahead. At 53 years old, he was well-connected, hugely experienced in practical agriculture, fluent in te reo and tikanga and had lived in the Whanganui River Valley. His wife was the well-known and highly-regarded Pura Manihera. They shared an interest in securing the future of iwi, and strengthened during Gregor's years working for the Native Affairs Department and his appointment as Superintendent of the construction of a Maori Pa at an International Exhibition in Christchurch.



*Gregor and Pura McGregor with their children, Gig standing, George seated Rawinia (1885 - 1910), standing beside Gregor. Rhody McGregor family collection*

*Pura Manihera, Gregor's wife, was a remarkable and courageous woman, comfortable in Maori and settler worlds. Te Pura Manihera was a chieftainess of Ngā Poutama at Matahiwi, north of Whanganui, the daughter of Te Manihera. Pura was the first Maori woman to receive an O.B.E (Order of the British Empire). Husband Gregor recalled that in 1868, Pura's close relative, Te Rangihwinui, assigned her the role of leading the haka for a triumphant taua he led against Te Kooti. With three other young women, Pura travelled from Ranana to the Waikato, the Taupo district and then through the Urewera lands. After Te Kooti was put out of action, Te Rangihwinui and his party travelled to Opotiki. They returned to Whanganui by ship.*

Gregor probably met Pura at Ranana where he worked for the storekeeper, Stuart Manson, who had married Pura's widowed mother. A descendant, Bruce McGregor, wrote that, 'When Gregor moved upriver, European-style farming and orcharding had begun in the Whanganui River Valley. Gregor recalled many grassed clearings, with livestock, fruit trees and other plants providing evidence that Maori were being introduced to Pakeha ways. Missionaries and Government officers provided guidance, and probably gifted plants and livestock to help the developments they saw as desirable. Maori also cultivated

large areas of potatoes, maize, kumara, taro and wheat, using bullocks to work the single-furrow ploughs and tine harrows.

‘The township was well-supplied with potatoes and maize from upriver, while large quantities of peaches, melons, quinces and other fruit were sent down to the town’s market. Along with useful food crops, the settlers had introduced plants which flourished in the warmer climate, turning from useful hedging to nuisance plants. Gorse and blackberry completely took over in some areas, growing up to 20 feet high in some places. In the 20 years between 1886 and 1906, much of the cleared land reverted to bush. Sheep were introduced upriver in 1883, when a leading Hawke’s Bay rangatira, Renata Kawepo, presented Te Rangihwinui/Major Kemp with 2000 merino ewes. They were distributed amongst the river hapū from Parikino to Parinui, and grazed on large areas of cleared land, sown with inferior seed. Despite the country being too wet for this type of sheep, they did well enough to provide a relatively large income.’

Gregor and Pura left the River Valley to farm first at Okoia and then at Fordell, until Gregor accepted the position of Bushy Park Farm Manager at Kai Iwi, north of Whanganui. There he managed a large sheep farm and cattle stud for the Moore family. He appears to have next worked for the Native Affairs Department as the Assistant Purchases Officer. In 1906, he was promoted to Native Lands Purchase Officer, and appointed as superintendent for construction of the Maori pa at the International Exhibition being planned for Christchurch. The new appointment meant he could more readily obtain the necessary building materials, including authentic forest items. This led to Gregor revisiting the river valley, where, reportedly, he had not been for 16 years.

‘He and Pura recruited experienced carvers and builders from the Whanganui area to assist in the erection of various buildings and palisades at the Pa. Supplejack and Manuka rods were gathered from the Whanganui River Valley and shipped to the Christchurch site, together with many bundles of totara bark and nikau leaves. They bought several old whare from upriver and had them dismantled and

shipped south, complete with thatch. Two whare of considerable size were stacked on the riverbank awaiting the arrival of the steamer. Overnight a sudden fresh in the river carried away both in their entirety. Six canoes up to 50 ft long were also purchased locally for the Exhibition'.<sup>8</sup> By then, Gregor noted, much of the land had reverted to bush, or was infested by introduced plants, particularly gorse and blackberry.

When Gregor first took up his position as Manager at Morikau Farm, the property had little in the way of home comforts. Pura and the children remained in town at their Harrison St property, a three-gabled villa with a wide front porch, looking towards the Awa and Ruapehu.

Early on, Gregor faced challenges beyond turning the property into a productive farm because not all the owners agreed with the appointment of a manager and the operation of the farm as a block. Gregor reported, 'The trespass of one of the natives who formerly had a number of stock on the land, and his active interference with my operations created a bad effect among the resident natives, and for a time almost brought farm work to a standstill. This uneasiness which delayed the work for about six months was only removed by the success of the Board in the Supreme Court Action which followed the trespass. This trespass caused loss to the farm by delaying works and incurring other expenses.'<sup>9</sup>

Pauro Marino, who was one of the owners, had a different interpretation, claiming that the Board had no legal right to act as it had. He camped out on the farm, apparently removed some fences, and fenced other areas. Eventually, the court ruled that the owners and the Board had the right to farm the property and that Mr Marino should leave them to it.<sup>10</sup>

He conceded and daily farming life became more regular. Though Gregor was accustomed to outdoor life, everyday living was tougher than usual for the first 19 months. He and the staff began by living in camp. In his full first report, presented to the Aotea Land Board in June, 1912, and covering the period from his appointment in





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1910 until March 1912, Gregor recalled, "We were living in camp. Part of that time we had a *raupo* whare, with an iron roof as a kitchen. Later on, I had a small *whare* of one room, built for myself. This is now used as a men's hut." The only other buildings were two *pataka* described as 'a small iron hut at Ranana and one at Jerusalem for holding stores'. Tent floors and temporary buildings at Mairehau Camp provided extra warmth and shelter.

"Building timber landed on the property from Town is almost prohibitive in price," he said, probably confirmed when he ordered timber for a new house built later in the year and finished by Christmas. He had noted the presence of 'much milling timber on the block' and 'a considerable quantity would be needed for woolshed, stable and other necessary farm buildings, as well as for the better housing of the natives living on the block'. Looking ahead he said, "it had been decided to purchase a small second-hand sawmilling plant". The engine had a multiple use as it would provide 'power for chaff cutting, shearing, and cutting firewood' as well. Furthermore, it would be a wise purchase because estimates were that 'the saving on farm buildings alone' would likely equal if not exceed the total cost of engine and plant.

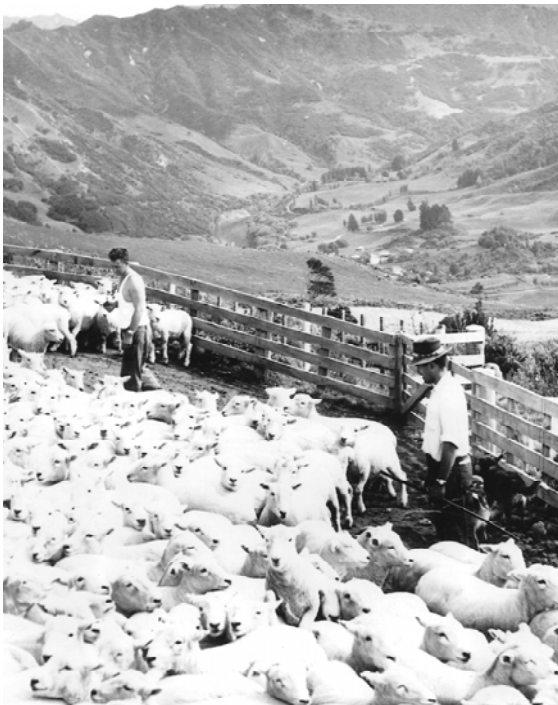
With proposals to fell over 1000 acres of bush during the coming winter, with contracts let to all but one 'native gang', plenty of timber would be available.

The house was built relatively close to a spring 'some 45 chains (905.256 m) distant from the only area of easy ground large enough for a working homestead site'. The water was laid through a  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch (1.9 cm) pipe, 'valuable for house use' and 'eventually will permanently water four paddocks...otherwise without water'.

Gregor noted that when he took possession of the block for the Board, 'the land was fully stocked with sheep, horses, cattle and pigs owned by natives, and running wild. Few of the owners resided on the block but some of them had cultivations of one kind and another'. He added 'the land is eminently suitable for cattle production' and argued

that it was 'prudent to start the nucleus of a herd of Herefords. I anticipate they will provide a profitable venture in supplying the demands of a developing district'. Some he had bought were doing well as were their offspring, and the property already had some stud cattle. He added that sheep also did well though 'the last season was rather wet for them'. The sheep he had taken over were 'a nondescript lot of all ages and sexes with rams running with them all year round. Most of the rams were bred on the place. Many were not even docked, and all in poor condition'. Within 18 months, the property ran 1567 sheep, with Gregor buying, 'as opportunity offered, any sheep which the natives had on the land previously, in order, if possible eventually to get rid of the poor class of sheep and where the natives are farming themselves, to induce them to breed a better class of sheep'.

There were about eighty horses 'mostly of a useless sort', over one hundred inbred cattle, with several bulls running with them. 'The country was simply alive with pigs, all the open country being rooted over ...a poor lot being inbred and starved'. The pigs must have been moved on, or been killed, as Gregor reported that within the 19 months 'a large area of pig-rooted country has been surface-sown with English grasses'.



*Morikau still runs a predominantly Romney flock, built on Gregor McGregor's determination to improve the breeding standard and productivity.*

He also oversaw almost the erection of 5 km of fencing, almost 5.3 km of tracks and about 1.8 km of dray road, 64 acres (25 ha) of land ploughed and cropped, 390 (157.8 ha) acres of bush felled and sown, and 500 acres (202 ha) cleared of noxious weeds.

Timber was expensive but the situation was being resolved as is partially indicated by the stockpile of 1400 posts and 30000 fencing battens, and posts and rails for stockyards to be erected. Nonetheless Gregor remained somewhat frustrated as he reported that all he could get for fencing material was pitau (fern tree) and hauling it was 'too costly' so he ordered 'some red birch posts from Rangataua' until staff could access the fencing timber growing on the property.

The owners had grazed their own stock on the Station before the changes but eventually Gregor persuaded them to move their

animals. His overall assessment of the land, particularly the open and partly open country, was that it was in bad condition. It grew mostly weeds, many of them noxious, including pennyroyal, Californian thistle and ragwort, briars over much of the open land, a couple of blackberry thickets and numerous plants growing in open areas. Gorse was 'very bad indeed especially on the hill sides and in the scrub'. The Ranana block had about 800 cleared acres, also with infestations of blackberry. Gregor reported that 'as almost all of this open land was needed for the natives' stock, and the natives desired to retain the use of it, this has not been brought under the operations of the farm. The natives, however, have been forced to clear the weeds'.

Little or no grass had 'ever been sown' and there were three 'bad grasses hard to eradicate' including the creeping sporobolus and the heavy-seeding agrostis stolonifera. The few fences present were not stock proof. 'They were mostly of the usual Maori kind, stakes with timber (scrub etc) filled in between. There were a few wire fences, but badly erected, the wire lying on the ground and being pulled about by the stock. There were no roads worthy of the name, only the usual Maori sledge track with no attempt at grading. In some places, it was even dangerous to ride along them in wet weather. At Ranana, some fences had been added, along with some roads and some crops planted'. Perhaps even worse was Ngarakau, which 'was in a deplorable condition. Years ago about 1000 acres had been cleared. The balance remained in native bush. Through neglect, the once open land had become infested with blackberry to such an extent that the area of grass was reduced to about 250 acres'. Gregor took the task of eradication seriously, concentrating 'all available labour' on cutting it to prevent summer seeding. Costly, but essential, 'these operations were absolutely necessary for the safety of all land in the vicinity'. A rainy season meant the blackberry and scrub did not burn as well as was hoped, but Gregor was determined to 'get the best results out of it' as it was 'ideal fattening land', it would need to be ploughed, cropped and resown.

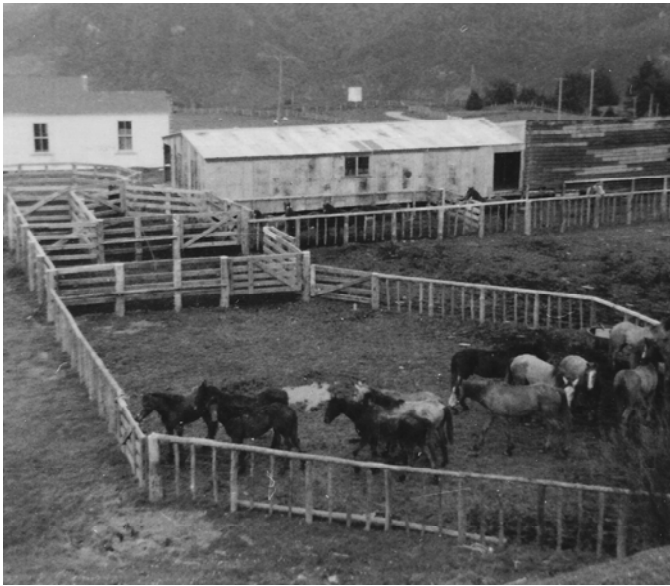
He noted 'on my assuming charge, I made an attempt to work the land with Jerusalem as a landing place for stores, etc, and a track

was made to the higher ground where a camp was pitched'. This access was found much too steep, costly and insecure, and on the Ranana and Ngarakauwhakarara Blocks being added to the farm, the Ranana landing was brought into use and a dray road constructed from there to the camp site.

By the end of Gregor McGregor's tenure, £42,252 had been spent on the property, drawing on mortgage money, accumulated profits and a bank overdraft, but the owners had had no distribution of funds. Displeased, they argued with the Board that the manager be dismissed.

By 1925, a new manager was in place. Mr F A (Fred) Piper also found maintaining the balance between the board's and the owners' philosophical and economic goals challenging. The owners complained to the board periodically about Mr Piper's refusal to pay more than the going rate, or his hiring European instead of Maori contractors.

Four years later, in November 1929, the new manager, William (Bill) Davidson reported that the stock was in bad condition and that fences needed repairs, problems noted earlier as ongoing challenges along with clearing the noxious weeds, that faced every manager in turn. With an improvement in stock and wool prices, and good management, Bill Davidson turned the property around. In 1934, shareholders were paid their first dividend, though with so many involved each received only a small sum. Two years later the owners contributed £250 to 'the carving, tukutuku and taniko of the Maori Anglican Church being built at Putiki'.<sup>11</sup>



*Horses have been an integral part of stock operations since 1910. They are still used today to access some of the land during mustering. Initially five plough horses and four hacks were available. Ten working bullocks provided other hauling power. The farm had its own milking cows, 16 dairy heifers, 20 pigs, and 95 goats. Bulldozers were later used to clear tracks, smooth paddocks and create an airstrip. Tractors were then introduced and worked the cropping paddocks. As might be expected, four-wheel drive vehicles and four wheel farm bikes are used extensively, tackling steep, uneven tracks in most weather. Roke Family Collection*

Under Mr Davidson, the property flourished, with reports in the late 1930s praising his practice of maintaining fences, and buildings to a high standard, improving pasture quality and judiciously stocking of the farm. The property continued to turn a profit through the 1940s although wartime labour shortages reduced the manpower available to assist in clearing the bush. The focus turned to maintaining and improving existing pasture, apparently achieved early in the War but reducing as it continued. By 1946, property inspectors reported the farm was deteriorating in the absence of the best use of fertiliser, overstocking and a failure to rotate the paddocks in grazing. They reported that maintenance had been neglected, noxious weeds were taking over, and fences needed replacing. While lack of labour had

probably been a contributing factor, the War was over and the manager was directed to hire more staff.

When Bill Davidson left in 1950, so did one of the shepherds, Ranana-born Rhody McGregor, son of Gregor McGregor and his second wife, Paurina Haami. George Johns was appointed as manager and managed the station for about three years. Rhody recalled that, he “left just before docking.” The property supervisor, Jeff Lewis, contacted Rhody “as he needed two shepherds who could do the docking and preferably knew the property”. Rhody obliged though he had become involved in shearing, an activity which involved him for 26 years. He had a gang of his own for five years and “ended up with 11 sheds,” including the Dickies at Waverley.



*Working a pen of sheep in a paddock. Today metal railings may be used rather than the wooden structures used earlier. Roke Family Collection*

Eventually, Rhody decided it was time to go home rather than work for others. He said he “farmed and drove a bulldozer”. In fact, he developed his own bulldozing business, contracting his services out. In 1954 – 1955 he was one of three drivers that put the Morikau airstrip in. “It was 300m long,” he said. “We moved the house six miles to the back of the station. I also did the Mokonui lambing beat. I had 1200 sheep of my own, and Mokonui had 2500.”

Jack Liddell managed the property from about 1954, working towards improved productivity and presentation. Stock losses in 1956 were confirmed as being due to blackleg, with a vaccination programme being successfully implemented to reduce deaths. In 1957, plans for a new woolshed were developed as were plans to build a new house, an administration block, a store shed and a new cookhouse. Timber from the property was used to reduce costs, while the existing homestead provided accommodation for one of the shepherds. Roothing was a focus in 1958 with new roads consolidating well. They had been re-metalled from the County road to the woolshed. The financial position remained sound and owners were paid a dividend.

Ian Roke took over from Jack Liddell in December 1958. The station carried around 8200 ewes, 6500 hoggets, 2000 two-tooth wethers and 800 breeding cows. Initially Ian reported directly to the farm supervisor, Reg Collier, and later to the Incorporation Chair, Rangi Metekingi. They worked closely to upgrade the property, rid the land of noxious weeds, and increase productivity. In 12 years a massive amount was achieved, all with the Station's own labour. Projects implemented and completed included building the woolshed, new stables, the stockyards and an airstrip and manure bin.



*Visitors viewing the Station during a visit scheduled especially for shareholders.*  
Morikaunui Incorporation Collection





*Above: Ian Roke and his dogs take a moment for reflection.  
Below: Checking on the horses. Roke Family Collection*





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## NGĀ WURUHĒTI – WOOLSHEDS

Ian's first major task was to organize the building of a new shearing shed and the placement of the pens. "The old woolshed was causing problems with septicaemia in the sheep, so it had to go. The decision to replace it had been made so I just had to oversee the project," he said.

By 1960, the shearing complex was completed and the new sheep and cattle yards had "greatly improved working conditions," Ian said. The new woolshed contained eight shearing stands and surrounding yards and was capable of holding night pens of 1,900 ewes. An attached swim-through dip was included.



*Above: The Woolshed at Morikau under construction*

*Below: Shearing in progress. Roke Family Collection*





*Above: Shearing in progress. Roke Family Collection*

Morikau Station has had several woolsheds, the first near the Whanganui River. In 2011, two woolsheds were in use, one on Morikau, noted above, and another on Mokonui. The Mokonui shed was opened in 2008 when Winiata Tapa became the first person to shear a sheep in the new shed. He and his brother, Louis, were both shepherds at Morikau when the main woolshed was opened in 1959.



*Above: Fish Maraku - Morikau shearing contractor. Morikaunui Incorporation Collection*



*Above: Win Tapa opens the shearing at Mokonui in 2008. Morikaunui Incorporation Collection*

Initially sheep were shorn outdoors using blade shears. Extra help came from the gangs of blade shearers who moved through the district. By the 1915 – 1916 season, temporary enclosures were used. Soon afterwards a Whanganui building firm was hired to erect a woolshed and sheepyards. Sited beside the river road at Ranana and near the Morikau Road turnoff, the shed was built of timber milled on the station. Historian Bruce McGregor noted that the site was chosen because it was close to the river and not far to take the wool bales for loading onto the Whanganui-bound cargo vessel, although it was a long way to bring the flock for dipping and shearing. From the 1916 – 1917 season, machine shearing became the norm with a steam engine doing triple duty. The wood-fired, 8 HP Hornby steam engine powered the sawmill most of the year. It was hauled using a team of six bullocks to the shearing shed during the season, and to the paddocks to fire the chaff cutter during the autumn. Some ten years later, the woolshed was



dismantled, transported in sections by bullock team, and rebuilt four kms uphill past the homestead.

*With a huge crowd at Ranana for a Hui Aranga during Ian's first Easter Weekend, supplying meat for more than 1000 people was a challenge. Morikau Station hands butchered and dressed 50 young ewes, four bullocks and 17 pigs for the event. That same weekend the Prime Minister visited the Station. Wanganui Chronicle 1959*

"In those first years we decided to put on no fertilizer and concentrate on improving the fencing and ridding the farm of gorse," Ian recalled. Spraying costs were immense to begin with. "We had the property to the stage where, in 1967, Sewell Bros, the spraying contractors, quoted \$15,000 for the first year's spraying, the next year \$10,000, the following year \$5000, and after that it was only spot spraying. It was just amazing to see the improvement in stock health. Our lambing percentage and the bull mating rates rose. Our stock went off fat and we never needed to sell store beasts. One year we produced 12000 ewes, 500 bales of wool and were fattening lambs as well. But we lost 27 cattle in the gorges. I hadn't sold any tailenders, and they went foraging. So next year, we pulled back to around 400 bales of wool, still fattened lambs and raised more cattle. That was the committee's preference. But I almost got the sack. "

With the new facilities and pasture improvements, the Station received compliments on its wool quality at market. By 1960 the first scrub clearing and fencing projects had been completed. In the mid-1960s a new airstrip was formed, adjacent to the Homestead. Bulldozing contractor, Terry O'Hagan, had earlier worked at Morikau, clearing tracks and preparing paddocks for cropping. He said, "We put a generator on the side of the bulldozer so we could have lights, and worked night and day so they could get the cropping done. Then they got wheeled tractors in and I ended up doing stumping only."

The new airstrip provided facilities for up-to-date topdressing with seven miles cut out of carting fertiliser to the old strip at the back of the property. Planes were also able to travel north or south of the main

ridge once they had taken off. "There was a bit of pressure to finish the job. I used to work in the moonlight but that was okay because it was only a hundred yards from the homestead," he said. "When I first went up there I stayed in the single men's quarters. There was no power and they had their own generator."



*While the new airstrip was still being constructed, Tom Masters from the Wanganui Aeroclub flew in for a visit and took Terry O'Hagan for a flight over the station. O'Hagan Family Collection.*

The property used a diesel generator, a huge plant which came from HMNZS Irirangi, formerly an inland naval base. "The generator was turned on at 4 PM, and off again at 10 PM, except on Monday mornings when it ran until 10 AM, "so that we women could do the washing," recalled Ian's wife, Ann. "We learned to plan and cope," she said of the agitator machine with its built-in mangle.

Ian added, "We had a proper workshop. It was worth its weight in gold. All staff were invaluable. John Paki did the plumbing and building work as well as general chores. Vincent Marshall was a little, wiry fellow and a real hard worker. Snow Davies built spray trailers and similar items."

Like many large farming operations of the time, the property was self-contained. Four houses, a cook-house and the single men's quarters provided accommodation for Ian, the two single shepherds, as well as the head shepherd Winiata Tapa, the married shepherd Louis Tapa and his family, the mechanic Snow Davies, the general hand John Paki, and stalwarts like Vincent 'Bandy' Marshall. Casual and contract

labour was hired for haymaking, fencing and other agricultural needs, including a bulldozer driver. Eventually, the property bought its own bulldozer because it was more economic with so much work, forming tracks, digging dams and even creating an airstrip.”



*Ian holding his baby son, Stuart, with his brothers, David and Alistar, and his wife's brother, Donald Wickham in 1962. The shed behind them is the meat safe. Note the water tank beyond. Roke Family Collection.*

When Ian and Ann moved on in 1970, Peter Cameron took over. Peter Cameron spent from 1971 to 1976 at Morikau. He, his wife Diane, and their four sons became involved in station and valley life. The farm focus was on sheep and cattle, fencing and noxious weed control. Peter first visited Morikau as a boy with the Okoa carrier, Alec Penn, to deliver a load of macrocarpa strainers for the cattle yards. Twenty-five years later the yards were still being used.



*Above: Extended yards improved stock management. Roke Family Collection*





*Above left: Peter Cameron. Above right: John Paki, a loyal and long-serving staff member. Cameron Family Collection*

Following initial brucellosis and TB testing, the cattle handling increased and the yards were renovated with a new concrete floor and railway iron post and rails. Peter said the first testing produced “an unusual result. Of 1900 females in the commercial herd there were only six condemned reactors, an excellent result. But six of the twelve house cows were reactors. Somewhat dismaying.” He concentrated on breeding a particular Romney strain suited to hill country, buying the rams from John Daniell at Bideford, whose parents had owned the ‘Wairere’ stud in the Wairarapa.

The station’s head shepherd, Trevor Smythe, recalled working with the internationally-known Annabel Langbein. A station casual, Annabel was regarded as very capable. Annabel remembered “hanging out with Ma Butler” and being “terrified driving the D5”. Curly Mickleson, the station bulldozer contractor, who had Annabel working with him to put in outback culverts, said, “Annabel was a bloody good girl; she bought beautiful salad lunches onto the job”.



*Snow was a seasonal hazard. Ruapehu is on the horizon. Cameron Family Collection*

Life was not all work. Shepherds played polocrosse with other river horsemen while duck shooting was 'a great event' and deer and pig hunting "a basic condition of employment on weekends. A memorable sight to recall was the curl of smoke rising up from a ridge top as a hunter singed his newly-stuck pig," Peter said.

His replacement was Ranana-born Louis Tapa, who knew the property well. Louis had earlier worked on his father's farm and at Morikau. He had gained experience in other parts of the country as a shepherd and a head shepherd before he took up the Morikau manager's role. He faced the usual challenges of maintaining fences and pasture and maintaining stock quality. Regular events included buying in drenching guns and vaccines to maintain flock and herd health and woolpacks to contain the fleeces coming off 17,000 ewes; sending dry cows to the Imlay freezing works or to the sale yards at Fordell; selling mature age cull rams and ensuring the shearing and crutching was organised. He also ensured enough beef and mutton was available to feed to staff. "While 16 or 17 two-tooth wethers and a couple of bullocks was usual, one month we supplied 29 two-tooth wethers to feed the staff and the shearers," he said.

His immediate successor was Rex 'Hubba' Browning, the first manager to produce a turnover of \$1,000,000. He described Morikau as

a high-maintenance property. He and board member Robin Peehi Murphy developed and managed a five-year gorse control programme. “We had most of the gorse cleared at the end of that,” he said. He was followed by Mark Haynes (1996 – 1999) who recalled the shearing shed as the focus of a big shearing competition. Dennis Ranginui and Mike Tosi were the next two managers.

The current manager, Steven Kelleher, was appointed in December 2009. He is very keen continue the development that has started. “The three most important things here are to fence the bigger paddocks, use fertilizer to increase the field nutrition and to pay close attention to animal genetics,” he says.



*Farm bikes have replaced horses for most activities. Morikau Incorporation Collection*



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## TE KŌKIRI WHAKAMUA – LOOKING AHEAD

The Board instigated a comprehensive strategic management plan in 2005. This is being used to develop the Station. It includes upskilling staff, streamlining stock movements by building a second woolshed on the Mokonui side, adding covered yards on the home block, building six kms of laneways and new satellite yards six kms from the main woolshed. Ms Benevides noted that this has led to faster, more efficient shearing and an improvement in animal health. Returns have increased by 31 per cent and expenditure decreased by just over 12 per cent. Sub-division has doubled the number of paddocks to 61, enabling intensive rotational grazing and pasture renewal. A better balanced 70:30 stock management system favouring sheep over cattle has seen breeding ewe numbers increasing and breeding cow numbers decreasing. “We are building up pasture quality and the genetic base of the stock. The genetic improvement will be permanent and cumulative with every generation better than the previous one,” Ms Benevides said.

“Many staff come from, or have, family links to, the Whanganui River. Staff welfare and skills development are a major part of the farm’s business plan and workers are encouraged to attend appropriate training courses,” she noted.

With the Board committed to maintaining development on Morikau and working closely with its manager, Morikau Station is poised to enter its second century in good health and great heart.

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<sup>1</sup> 15 May, 1948. Letter from beneficial owners to Minister of Māori Affairs. MA Acc W2459 Box 23 5/2/4 Pt 4. Wellington. Archives New Zealand cited in Tinirau, 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Te Rangihwinui was also known as Major Kemp, a tribal leader to Whanganui iwi who initially fought alongside the Government constabulary. He later opposed the Government vociferously when it came to the alienation of lands, cited in Tinirau 2005.

<sup>3</sup> Guardianship.

<sup>4</sup> Walz 2000; Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of the Morikaunui Incorporated Block, 1 December, 1955.

- <sup>5</sup> These names are the ones members used most often.
- <sup>6</sup> The Whanganui Trust Annual Report 2008, Page 3.
- <sup>7</sup> The Whanganui Trust Annual Report 2009, Page 3.
- <sup>8</sup> McGregor, n.d., p 147
- <sup>9</sup> McGregor, Gregor. 1912. Manager's Report of Morikau Farm from August 1910 to 31 March, 1912.
- <sup>10</sup> Wanganui Chronicle, Volume L, Issue 12768, 30 June 1911, Page 2.
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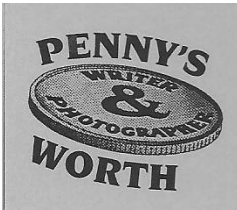
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Ian Jones photo

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