

“Not to know what happened before we were born is to remain a child” Cicero, 62BC

“You can’t make history unhappen” Philipp Klais, whose firm rebuilt the Auckland City Organ, 2010

Certain Maori tribes in the Wanganui region now know that persistence pays with the decision to remove from its present site, the “Weeping Woman” statue, erected in 1865 and said to be the first war memorial in the country.ⁱ

It commemorates the 15 loyal Maoris and one settler killed in 1864 when defending the Wanganui settlement in a battle with an upriver war party of which more than fifty are said to have been slain.ⁱⁱ Its inscription reads:

“To the memory of those brave men who fell at Moutoa 14 May 1864 in defence of law and order against fanaticism and barbarianism. The monument is erected by the Province of Wellington.”

One Rangimarie Manuel describes the monument as “hurtful” and feels concerned about the message it sends to Maori children. “It’s cruelty, and that’s the part that is hurting the people here,”ⁱⁱⁱ she said. Oh, come on now Rangimarie and weep on my other shoulder! Prior to 1840 Maoris were one of the most savage people on Earth, thousands being killed in intertribal battles and subsequently eaten. Does she expect such matters of fact to be deleted from history because they are “hurtful” to some people more than 150 years later?

As reported by Carter, “Political activist Ken Mair also objects to his ancestors being labelled fanatics and barbarians ... because they were trying to protect land that was rightfully theirs. ... ‘Pākaitore was only a small part of that picture, of 90,000 acres that was pinched from us through the misdeeds and the deceptive behaviour of people like Donald McClean (*sic*) and the surveyors that pinched our land.’” Readers may take that claim at face value if they want to!

Also entering the verbal fray is Nancy Tuaine, a board member of Awa FM reported^{iv} as saying: “I was showing someone around recently and I took them to Pakaitore. They read the inscription and they were shocked.”

Recall that what the inscription actually says is: “To the memory of those brave men who fell at Moutoa 14 May 1864 in defence of law and order against fanaticism and barbarism”.

To this Tuaine replies “To say that the way we practised our values, traditions and beliefs was barbarism or fanaticism is just not okay and is just a symbol of colonisation.”

Given that the utmost barbarity and wholesale cannibalism of tribal warfare scarcely one generation earlier and the sheer savagery of the Hau Hau rebellion then in full swing were actual facts, Tuaine’s claim that saying so “is just a symbol of colonisation” seems to me to be outright dissembling to say the least.

Continuing, she says that “the Taupo Quay waharoa (entrance) for pōwhiri and ceremony was also partly blocked by the Weeping Woman.” Well, fancy that! One would have thought that this alleged difficulty had been managed successfully for more than 150 years without too much of a problem. If it has become intolerable now, then surely some adjustment to the entrance on the other side would be possible while leaving the Weeping Woman alone.

However, what has happened has happened. Persistent nagging has won the day again and the “Weeping Woman” will be dislodged and moved to another place. At least we can be thankful that

she will not be dismembered and chucked unceremoniously into the river as is reported to have happened in a somewhat similar situation in Hamilton!

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- i Ben Carter, NZH Local Focus, 15 March 2023
- ii They were turbulent times; one soldier killed on 7th September 1868 in an assault on a rebel stronghold in nearby Taranaki being eaten by followers of rebel Hauhau chief Titokowaru. Paul Moon, "This Horrid Practice", ISBN978-0-16-300671-8, 2008, p.109
- iii Carter, *op.cit.*
- iv Moana Ellis, NZHerald, 23 December 2023