

Queen of the South

Danny Keenan



Te Rangi Topeora

On February 6, 1840, at Waitangi, 40 chiefs signed the document that founded New Zealand.

Many more signed the Treaty, at later dates. Many also refused to sign.

Each time, those signing ceremonies were big events.

And when the missionary Henry Williams took a copy of the Treaty to Kapiti Island on May 14, 1840, that was a big day, too.

As Williams came ashore a large group of Māori gathered to hear him sing the praises of the Treaty. Good relations between the settlers and the tangata whenua – and protection for Māori. That's how he advertised it.

When he'd wound up, four Māori stepped forward to sign, representing the families of Kapiti and the mainland coast.

The first was the paramount chief of Ngāti Toa, Te Rauparaha.

Next was his son, Tamihana Te Rauparaha.

(Twelve years later, Tamihana visited Queen Victoria in London and marvelled at her authority and power.

He wasn't so impressed with the exercise of that power by settlers in New Zealand. On his return from London, Tamihana spent the next six years persuading Māori to unite, and crown a king.)

The next to sign was Matene Te Whiwhi, who later became a key supporter of Tamihana's king making project.

And the last of the four was a woman, Te Rangi Topeora.

She was the one who bound them all together.

Rangi was a niece of Te Rauparaha, and a sister to Te Rangihāeta, his fighting chief.

She was also Tamihana's aunty – and Matene Te Whiwhi's mother. She had mana.

Te Rangi Topeora was born at Kawhia in the Waikato, in the early years of the 19th century, to Waitohi and Te Rakaherea, a Ngāti Toa couple from the Ngāti Kimiia and Ngāti Te Maunu hapu.

When she was little, white settlers hadn't come to Kawhia. However, Rangi would have been aware of the British plying the coast, chasing whales, killing seals and cutting timber.

But, although the newcomers kept out of Kawhia, Rangi's childhood was upsetting, which she dealt with, in part, by putting events to music.

While she was young, for example, her sisters were killed in battles with Waikato. She wrote waiata about that. There were other waiata, too, cursing her sisters' killers.

She also moved south, on the Ngāti Toa heke, led by her uncle,

Te Rauparaha. Eventually, the iwi put down roots at Kapiti Island, and on the mainland coast nearest to Kapiti.

On the way through, they'd tickled up Taranaki with their muskets, and captured a number of pa.

Some major fights occurred around Motonui and Waitara, before Te Rauparaha and local Te Atiawa decided to cool things the old way – by arranging alliances and marriages.

Rangi struck up one such alliance, with Te Ratutonu, a local chief from Motonui.

However, when Te Rauparaha moved south, Rangi lost sight of her new man.

Warfare against Taranaki continued, though. A little later Te Rauparaha encountered South Taranaki warriors who fled to Tapuinikau pa, near Opunake. Ngāti Toa laid siege.

That's when they discovered that Rangi's lover, Te Ratutonu, was holed up inside. What to do?

They called Te Ratutonu out, and there and then, Rangi married her man. While the marriage didn't bring peace, it did buy time. Those in the pa escaped.

Rangi had plenty of men. Four husbands, it's said, and plenty of lovers. When Te Ratutonu died in 1822, she married Rangikapiki, of Te Arawa. Matene Te Whiwhi was a son from this marriage.

Later, Te Wehioterangi, also of Te Arawa, came along.

Pity help anyone who came between Rangi and her men, too. Her fourth husband, Hauturu, had an affair with a slave girl at Kapiti – and when Rangi heard about it, she had the girl put to death, on the spot.

Life on Kapiti had other upheavals. There was rumbling conflict between the newcomers, and those who'd been there for some time. Muaupoko regarded Kapiti as their home, and resisted Ngāti Toa – and Rangi took part in the fighting.

That feuding claimed the lives of some of Te Rauparaha's children – and Rangi made sure there was revenge, measure for measure.

She wasn't just a woman of war, however. She could bring tribes together.

Once, when Ngati Tama moved on to the island, Rangi offered her son Matene as a peacemaker.

The Ngati Tama chief, Pehitaka, responded by giving his daughter. The young couple married, and a peace was sealed.

When Te Rangi Topeora signed the Treaty at Kapiti on May 14, 1840 she didn't become the Crown's poodle.

Her brother, Te Rangihāeta, later challenged Nelson settlers at Tuamarina over lands on the Wairau Plains. There were shootings and killings, and settlers were outraged.

Then the conflicts moved to Wellington. Te Rangihāeta challenged the Crown in the Hutt Valley, asserting the right of Ngati Toa to keep their lands there, regardless of the Wakefield settlers.

In 1845, Governor Grey ordered the British Army to drive Ngati Toa from the valley, and forced them to retreat as far north as Otaki.

Rangi was furious at this.

Mad at the settlers, and mad at

Maori who wouldn't back her brother

And she was influential enough on at least one occasion to over-ride Te Rauparaha and Te Rangihāeta. Against their wishes, she allowed whalers to use Kapiti as a base – a trade that later proved a money spinner for Ngati Toa. She also leased part of her land near the mouth of the Otaki River.

Te Rangi Topeora was a leader of her people, and a central figure in war and peace.

She was also an orator, a singer, a poet and, as her marriages and relationships suggest, a woman of some passion as well.

When she was baptised by Bishop Selwyn, there was only one baptismal name that she had in mind: Kuini Wikitoria.

To underline the point, one of her husbands was given the name Arapeta – after Albert, the English monarch's husband.

So it was that Rangi became known as Queen of the South.

It's not known when she died – sometime, it seems, between 1865 and 1873.

The three other Maori who signed the Treaty of Waitangi at Kapiti Island on May 14, 1840.

From top: Te Rauparaha, Tamihana Te Rauparaha and Matene Te Whiwhi.



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The Aotearoa Traditional Maori Performing Arts Society and Auahi Kore are working together to reinforce the Maori Smokefree kaupapa within our culture.

Traditional Maori performing arts is an ideal medium for the Auahi Kore message as it portrays the passion, strength and vitality of Maori – attributes which have served us well in facing the challenges to our culture.

Kapa Haka 2002 is a Smokefree / Auahi Kore event. However, designated smoking areas will be provided at the festival – see map on page 53 for details.

Festival hosts, Ngati Whatua, see the festival as a catalyst for their plans to bring in a Smokefree kaupapa for their *Orakei* marae. They look to the success of *Hoani Waititi* marae, who have had a Smokefree kaupapa for three years.

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