



# For house and home

Danny Keanan

Sometimes, it seems that the history that affects generations is made in a moment.

The assassination of Archduke Ferdinand in 1913 was one such hinge of history – a defining moment that led (as school kids used to be told) to World War I.

New Zealand's civil wars of the 1860s turned on a single day's event too: March 8, 1859, in New Plymouth, at the biggest meeting the town had ever seen.

That's when a junior chief, Te Teira Manuka, usurped his uncle Wiremu Kingi – paramount chief of Te Atiawa.

With a dramatic flourish he cast his korowai on the ground and told the governor, Thomas Gore Browne, that he'd sell the Pekapeka Block, the land on which Waitara now stands.

Te Teira had no right to offer the land, much less sell it. Crown officials knew this.

But they were keen to deal. They were being hounded by agitated settlers who were hungry for more land.

Any Maori who wanted to sell, the officials figured, should do so. After all, weren't Maori guaranteed, under the Treaty, the same rights as British subjects to sell their land?

At which point Wiremu Kingi stood up, and told the meeting:

"Listen, Governor. I will not permit the sale of Waitara to the Pakeha. Waitara is in my hands. I will not give it up. I will not. I will not. I will not."

He then left, taking his people with him.

When the surveyors came to carve up the block, Wiremu's people stopped them. British troops were then sent in to protect the surveying gang – so Wiremu built a pa at Te Kohia, on the south-eastern corner of the block.

On March 17, 1860, the British attacked the pa. The first Taranaki War had begun.

The war continued for a year, with the British suffering losses and military setbacks, but eventually forcing the

warriors to retreat. A truce was signed and, bit by bit, the entire Taranaki tribal region was confiscated, as punishment of a people who had been "in rebellion".

To this day, the grievance lingers.

Wiremu Kingi was born Te Rangitake, sometime in the 1790s, at *Manukorihi* pa, high above the Waitara River. His dad was Te Rere-ta-whangawhanga, one of the great Te Atiawa leaders of the time, and his mother was Te Kehu.

He grew up in Waitara, and as a young man took part in Te Rauparaha's raids south to Kapiti.

In the 1820s, he joined a heke of north Taranaki Maori to Waikanae. He settled there, took the name Wiremu Kingi at his baptism, but was often distracted by tensions within Ngati Raukawa.

Meanwhile, in the space of only a few months, in 1839 and 1840, traders, land purchasers, missionaries and British settlers began to arrive at Petone.

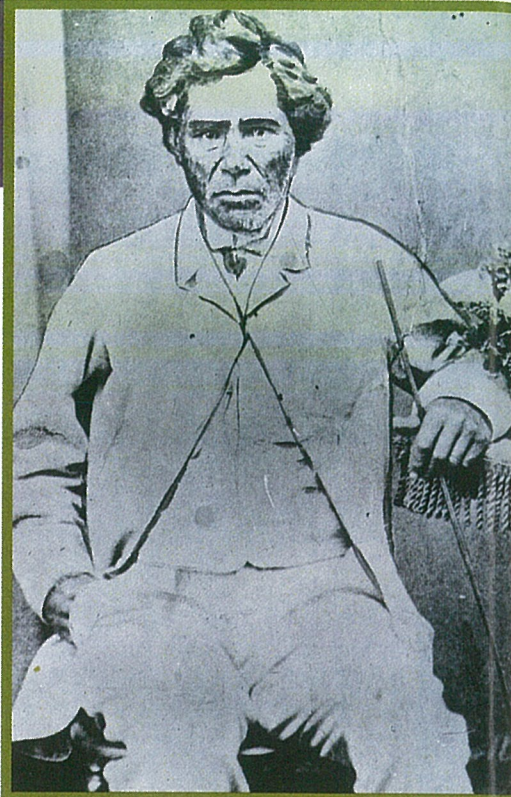
Te Atiawa had no inkling of the impact the settlers would have on them – and no understanding either of the deed documents that Colonel William Wakefield placed before them.

At Wakefield's insistence, they put their marks on these deeds, Wiremu Kingi among them – little knowing that these papers might make them trespassers in their own lands.

Soon after, Wiremu also signed another document – a Maori version of the Treaty of Waitangi, which had been brought to Waikanae by the missionary Henry Williams.

Meanwhile, in the wake of the New Zealand Company "purchases", shiploads of British settlers were spilling onto the beaches at Petone and Taranaki. In June 1844, the land commissioner, William Spain, awarded the company 60,000 acres in and around New Plymouth, on the strength of deeds signed by a small group of Te Atiawa living there.

Scores of settlers began to occupy the lands around Waitara, too.



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Wiremu Kingi, photographed on the eve of the first Taranaki War.

Governor Fitzroy, meanwhile, saw that the local people had been diddled – and he tried to limit the settlers to a 3500-acre block, now present-day New Plymouth.

The settlers were furious that they'd been given so little land. Maori were dismayed they'd been given so much.

Wiremu Kingi now knew he had to return to Waitara, and told the new governor, George Grey.

The Governor wasn't happy about this. He saw the return of Wiremu and the Waikanae people as upsetting a "delicate political balance".

He insisted that they settle on the north side of the river. Wiremu said, in effect: "Thanks, but I'll build my pa where and when I please." The Governor threatened to chase his waka with a steamer and sink it.

In the event, 600 Te Atiawa walked, or paddled or drove stock from Waikanae to Waitara without incident, in 1847, and settled on the south side of the river. Perhaps they were mindful of a lingering threat from Waikato, who still had burial grounds on the northern side.



But life at the *Waitara* pa was tough.

For the next 11 years, government land purchase agents hounded them to sell land for the New Plymouth settlement.

The constant pressure caused rifts and disputes among Te Atiawa – the “friendlies” (as the land purchase officers called them) versus the “obstructives”.

Wiremu tried to mediate. He often wrote of his wish for friendly relations with the settlers, and his belief that he shouldn't have to sell land to achieve this.

He was, according to an historian, Ann Parsonson, “a chief of great influence and authority”. She says he “stood on his dignity and kept his distance from those he saw as quite careless of Maori rights”.

At the time, Maori had no need to sell up. They were working for the settlers, selling produce to them. They were well off and the land was productive. But the pressure remained.

Then, in March 1859, at that New Plymouth meeting, Te Teira made his offer to the Crown.

Treacherous? Maybe – but a move that probably didn't surprise Wiremu Kingi.

Apparently, Te Teira held Wiremu responsible for a decision by a young wahine to jilt a close relative of his. Instead (said the missionary, Octavius Hadfield), the wahine had married Wiremu's son.

Feeling miffed, Te Teira decided to exact revenge.

The Government, meanwhile, had changed its rules. Rather than waiting for all claimants to agree to a sale, it was considering buying individual blocks, piecemeal, as they became available.

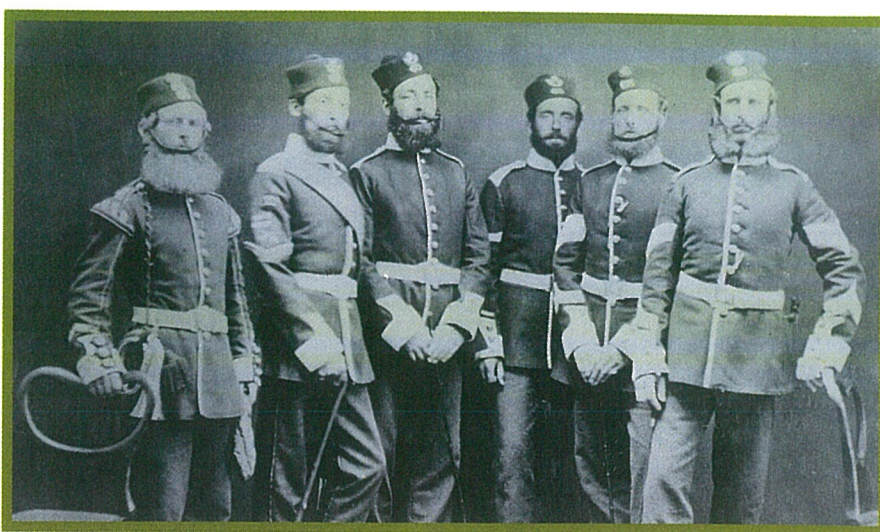
This, they figured, was the only way to crank up Taranaki land sales.

Wiremu, on the other hand, refused to be drawn into making an individual claim on the land. He was the trustee and protector of the rights of the whole community.

He rejected the Government's divide and conquer strategy – of paying a deposit to any group that came forward, and obliging other members of the hapu to prove their rights to the Crown, in order to protect them.

That strategy, he believed, was an interference in Te Atiawa's right to

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Six soldiers of the Light Company, 65th Regiment of the British Army which fought against Te Atiawa and other tribes during the first Taranaki War. Or, possibly, a scene from *Monty Python*.

arrive at their own decisions about the use and disposal of land. Without that solidarity, he must have figured, how else could they keep the land buyers at bay?

The first Taranaki war lasted for a year, almost to the day.

The truce, signed in March 1861, was brokered by Wiremu Tamihana, of Tainui, who was keen to keep war away from Waikato.

The Crown's Taranaki confiscations began in 1865, and included the entire Waitara block. The town of Raleigh – later renamed Waitara – was laid out on both sides of the Waitara River.

And what of Wiremu Kingi?

During the wars, he withdrew inland, into Ngati Maru bush country. His fighting chief, Te Hapurona, carried the fight to the British Army and settlers.

He lived, for a time at Kihikihi among Ngati Maniapoto, and is said to have been present at the battle of Rangiriri in 1863.

After the wars and the confiscations the focus moved to Parihaka – and Wiremu returned to live deep in the Waitara bush, among Ngati Maru, near Purangi and Tarata, and stayed there for 12 years.

Many official overtures were made to him, but it wasn't until February 22, 1872 that he ended his seclusion, crossing the Waitara river, and walking with his people into New Plymouth.

As he entered the town, his eyes never left the ground. Crowds of settlers lined the streets, to see the man they'd heard so much about.

Wiremu Kingi and his people were met by the Native Minister, Donald McLean, and a large troupe of officials. They laid on a feast, and made grand speeches of reconciliation. Wiremu said nothing. Later, he simply asked the minister for the return of a pounamu mere lost in the wars.

Wiremu then moved to Parihaka, where he lived among Te Whiti's people for five years – before returning to the Ngati Maru bush country, where he died in 1882. He was over 90 years old.

When he died, the *Taranaki Herald* described him as a “turbulent chief to whom may be fairly attributed the difficulties and troubles Taranaki has passed through”...

Which is not how a 1927 Royal Commission, charged with investigating the confiscations, saw him.

Wiremu Kingi and his people were not, it said, “in rebellion against the Queen's sovereignty...”

“The Natives were treated as rebels and war declared against them before they had engaged in rebellion of any kind, and in the circumstances they had no alternative but to fight in their own self-defence.

“In their eyes, the fight was not against the Queen's sovereignty, but a struggle for house and home.”