Office of the Mayor

Mayoral Speech – Parihaka, Presentation of research into Taranaki Maori prisoners in Dunedin 1869-1881
Monday, 18 July 2016

Tēnā koutou katoa e huihui mai nei i tēnei ra
Ki te whare tupuna – e tu, e tu e tu
Ki ngā mate– haere, haere, e moe, e moe
Koutou mā e mau ana i te manawhenua o Taranaki, tēnā rawa koutou mo ngā mihi
E aku iti, e aku rahī, e aku rau rangatira mā – tena koutou katoa
E te paepae tapu koutou te hau kainga

Ko Takatimu te maunga
Ko Oreti te awa
Nō Ingarangi oku tupuna
Ko Dave Cull toku ingoa
Ko au te Koromatua o Ōtepoti
Ka kawe korero mo te tini i te ana
Nō reira
Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa.

People of Parihaka, of Ngāti Ruanui, of Ngāti Ruahine and of all the iwi of Taranaki, I bring greetings and salutations from the people of Ōtepoti/Dunedin, from my Council, from Toitū Otago Settlers Museum and from the Kāi Tahu Runaka of Ōtākou, Puketeraki and Moeraki.

I also come to acknowledge and commemorate your tupuna who were unjustly taken from your tribal whenua and brought to Ōtepoti/Dunedin. The imprisonment of your tupuna in Ōtepoti was a grievous wrong by the Crown. We are embarrassed that our city acted as their jailor in their imprisonment. We think of the whānau, matua whānau and tamariki left behind to fend for themselves. We think of the whānau broken and never mended. We think of those who did not return. They lie in our whenua. I acknowledge their presence in our place. I acknowledge the many other men who were taken from various iwi of Taranaki at various times and who also lie beneath the whenua of Ōtepoti.

However while your tupuna labored there, contributing much to the building of our city, their dignity made them many friends. Friends not just among manawhenua particularly at Otakou, notably Hori Kerei Taiaroa of Ngai Tahu and Raniera Ellison of Te Atiawa, who lived at Otakou and whose whanau had whakapapa back to Taranaki. But they made friends also among the Pākehā population of Dunedin. There were James Macandrew, Vincent Pike and Thomas Bracken among others who petitioned the government of the day to either give your tupuna a fair trial or release them.

Eventually those who survived were released. And over the years since, the bonds between your people and the Ngāi Tahu people of our place have been maintained. Over time the resting places of your tupuna have been identified, honoured and preserved. It is a privilege for our community to be carers for your tupuna. That is our sacred responsibility. We honoured that responsibility during the last two hikoi from Taranaki – hikoi of Ngāti Ruahine and Ngāti Ruanui to Ōtepoti.
However not everyone treats these significant episodes from our past and the immense importance of those to the Taranaki iwi – not everyone treats them so seriously. There are people who seek to exploit the wrongs of the past for personal gain and in doing so sow discord and lies between people. As you will know we had such a situation arise a few years back when some iron shackles were offered for sale at auction. It was claimed they had been retrieved from so-called ‘caves’ along the Otago Harbour edge – caves which we say your tupuna and other prisoners were kept in. It was claimed that the shackles had once been used to hold your tupuna.

When the possible sale of the shackles was brought to my attention, I consulted with Te Rūnanga o Ōtākou and together we talked with some of the Taranaki iwi. It was quickly clear that if indeed the shackles were what was claimed, it would be deeply offensive to put them on the market.

We had very little time to decide what to do so we made enquiries about the provenance of the shackles as quickly as we could. We initially concluded that it was possible that they came from the caves where the seller said he found them.

So to prevent them being hawked to the highest bidder and possibly end up in some tawdry display like a macabre trophy, I purchased the shackles. My Council still has them in safe keeping.

However we remained suspicious about the claims of the seller. So researchers at Toitū Otago Settlers Museum continued to investigate the shackles and where they might have come from.

Their research eventually found the claims about the shackles were not true. They weren't very old and didn't even come from New Zealand. They are probably camel shackles from the Middle East brought back to New Zealand after the First World War. They couldn't have been found in the so-called ‘caves’.

But sometimes good comes out of evil, and in the course of our research we learned much that we hadn't appreciated before – much that is good. First and importantly we learned that prisoners of that time in Dunedin – Maori or Pakeha – were almost never shackled. We learned that despite good records being kept there is no record of any of the Taranaki prisoners ever being shackled.

Rather we learned that all the Taranaki prisoners behaved in an exemplary fashion and were highly regarded and largely treated very well by their gaolers.

We learned much about the incredible contribution the Taranaki men made to the building of Ōtepoti/Dunedin. They built roads, harbour walls and laid the foundations of significant buildings like the University. They levelled the land that is now our city centre – the Octagon.

We discovered many very positive things about the Taranaki men and their time here. Indeed while I am still ashamed that the government of the time saw fit to imprison them in our city, I am also proud of the way the citizens of Dunedin treated the Taranaki men – your tupuna. We learned that they made firm friendships in Ōtepoti – that it was not uncommon for Dunedin citizens to give the Taranaki men tobacco and other gifts.

We learned as I said earlier that notable city leaders took up the cause of the Taranaki prisoners and petitioned central government on their behalf.

We learned that it is possible that the so-called caves were not even in existence at that time so it may not have been possible for the men to be held in them at all.

And we learned that when they were released and were preparing to board the coastal steamer to take them north back to Taranaki, the Dunedin people feted them and bought them new suits of clothes and gave them money for their journey and sent them on with good will.
We learned that Ōtepoti/Dunedin owes a debt of friendship and gratitude to the Taranaki iwi whose men helped build our city.

So we extend the hand of fond memory and friendship to the Tarankai iwi. Your tears for your lost tupuna are also our tears. We value the bonds built between our peoples so long ago and assure you that your tupuna are in our community’s care.

And in recognition of that friendship and that memory I offer koha.

This is a feather to symbolise the flight to freedom of your tupuna. It is a feather of pounamu carved by Ewan Duff who is a mokopuna of Te Whao, later called Rangi Tupoki, a Taranaki prisoner who stayed in Ōtepoti, married Katarina Habi and lived until he passed on at the age of 90 at Puketeraki.

And this is the record of our research into the shackles and the circumstances of the Taranaki prisoners whom they were falsely claimed to have held. It is not the definitive or final word on the matter and on their experience in Ōtepoti.

In some ways it is just the start of recording and chronicling that time in our city’s history so intwined with the people of Taranaki. And it is written from the records that we could find from the period. There is much that is not in here. Especially the memories of the Taranaki prisoners themselves and the memories of their whanau – preserved over time in stories handed down through generations.

I ask that some time, when the iwi of this place have read these records, that we can meet again to hear from your people the stories, the histories and the memories that you cherish from your tupuna. Those can add to our mutual understanding of that tumultuous but difficult time in the past of Ōtepoti/Dunedin that we share.

I also ask that the Taranaki iwi allow Dunedin to honour your men who helped build our city – both those that returned and those that lie now beneath the whenua of Ōtepoti – that you allow us to honour them among our varied city tupuna.

Dunedin started out as a Scottish settlement, but even then it relied on considerable assistance from Kai Tahu manawhenua. Then different peoples came and contributed other cultural colours to our city’s tartan – Chinese, Lebanese, Polish, Pasifika and many others. Your tupuna merit an honoured place among them.

We seek to embrace them as our city’s tupuna as well.

That is all I have to say for the moment, both in speech and in the pages of our research. Take my words in the spirit I offer them – with respect, care and honour. I will listen in the same spirit.

No reira
Tena koutou, tena koutou tena koutou katoa.

Dave Cull
Mayor of Dunedin