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PĀNUI PĀPĀHO / MEDIA RELEASE

Sowing seed again at Rangiaowhia after 159 years

On the 6th of December 2022 the first tupu was sown into the soil of Rangiaowhia at the hands of the Chair of the Apakura Rūnanga Trust, Bill Harris, representative of the descendants whose ancestors survived the Rangiaowhia massacre on the 21st of February 1864.

Bill Harris noted, “I feel really honoured to have sown the first tupu into the maara kai and to be able to visualise the restoration of our whenua back to what it once was – the foodbowl of the Waikato.”

On the 21st of February 1864 Rangiaowhia, a once peaceful and powerful Māori business community, sitting between Cambridge and Te Awamutu, experienced a heinous attack by more than one thousand soldiers and cavalry of the most powerful empire in the world at that time. Less than 300 Māori non-combatants, mainly old men, women and children were their targets. Many were killed, burnt alive, raped, shot and tortured. The British soldiers were later hailed as heroes for their ruthless tactics in confiscating the land and in dealing a devastating blow to local iwi.

The restoration of the whenua is the focus now. Five varieties of kūmara and peruperu have been replanted in the maara kai at Rangiaowhia. The vision is also to replant peach heritage seedlings – an iconic agricultural feature of the land’s flourishing orchards of the 1800’s, as well as re-establishing the horticulture and agriculture of that time with fruit trees, wheat, maize, potatoes and farm animals.

Chair Bill Harris has stated, “With the price of kai these days, teaching our people *how* to grow their own kai is vital. So the Rūnanga has invited Te Ahi Taapara Trust to assist in this process who specialise in mātauranga Māori cultivation, rongoā and kai sovereignty.”

The planting is currently taking place on a ten acre land block which was purchased by the Anglican church (through a private sale), with the intention of giving the land back to Ngāti Apakura and Ngāti Hinetū in a ceremony which was to be held on 5th of November last year but had to be postponed. The land is currently being leased to the iwi.

Local iwi leader and Māori Academic, Professor Tom Roa noted, “I am thrilled that this blessed whenua is once again growing kai with the good grace, goodwill of the Anglican Church and assistance of the Te Ahi Taapara Trust. We the descendants of the survivors of the pāhuatanga of Rangiaowhia still feel the mamae of the war crime perpetrated on our ancestors, but have good reason in this venture to look forward to reaping the benefits of the seeds sown, both in the land and in the people.”

One of many whānau planting days took place today as a lead into the 159th commemoration scheduled for the 21st of February 2023.

Bill Harris concludes, “We really want our people to know that they can come home to Rangiaowhia, that they can stand on their whenua and be a part of the commemorations and on-going restoration of the maara kai that once fed not just this community and nation, but nations around the world.”

ENDS

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Photo caption: CEO of Te Ahi Taapara, Lorinda Pereira, with Chair of Apakura Rūnanga Trust, sowing the first tupu into the soil at Rangiaowhia after 159 years.