

LEISURE

Of passing interest

Historical features in our landscape observed by the director of Puke Ariki
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Grave of Poharama Te Whiti, New Plymouth

In the small park at the western end of the New Plymouth walkway is the resting place of Poharama Te Whiti. As a small boy he witnessed the incursions into Taranaki and subsequent battles with iwi from the Waikato region and he is said to have been briefly held captive by them. Later he was one of the signatories to the 1840 Wesleyan Missionary Society Ngamotu Deed for 36.5 hectares of land that was to be used for a mission station and farm. The following year he assisted Plymouth Company settlers as they began their new lives in New Plymouth.

Poharama died on October 18, 1875. Just before his death he was living at Ratapihipihi, but sensing his death was imminent, he asked to be taken to his old village at Moturoa where he died. In 1934 Taranaki historian William Skinner drew to the attention of the New Plymouth Harbour Board the fact the grave of Poharama Te Whiti, which was in the garden of the harbourmaster's residence, was in a bad state of repair and asked that the board put it into order. However, it was to be another three years before a raised concrete pad was placed on the grave and a plaque, with the words "In honoured memory Poharama Te Whiti chief of Ngamotu a loyal friend to the pioneers died 1878", placed on top. Whoever was responsible for the wording was obviously unaware that they got the death date wrong. The grave is situated on part of the former Otaka pa and it was Skinner who had the grave surveyed so that it could be reserved for all time.

The naming of Poharama Place in Marfell also commemorates this great man.

