

## KORU MONASTERY

Interest seems to rise every decade or so on the Koru Monastery, and I feel it is time everything was put together in an article for future interested people before the history is totally lost.

The Monastery was situated on Koru Road about  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile before the present Koru and Plymouth Road, junction. The land was originally divided into sections for the Koru township which never eventuated. The majority of sections going to Irish militier.

After obtaining the Land deeds I find that they did not commence until 1884 so cannot prove that Father Rolland purchased the land, or just decided that it was an ideal spot.

The deeds were first signed by Wi Kamokamo, Oreivia Rua, Huria Tanaki, Mirika-Motuia Arakoa, Arakia and Peina (aboriginal natives of New Zealand) on 14th January 1884, then leased to Fanny MEREDITH on 2nd February 1895.

Transfer of the lease to Margaret Jane WILLIAMSON wife of Henry WILLIAMSON a Koru farmer took place on 10th July 1905. Lewis MACE then took ownership on 20th December 1909 and whilst in his possession the building was burnt down.

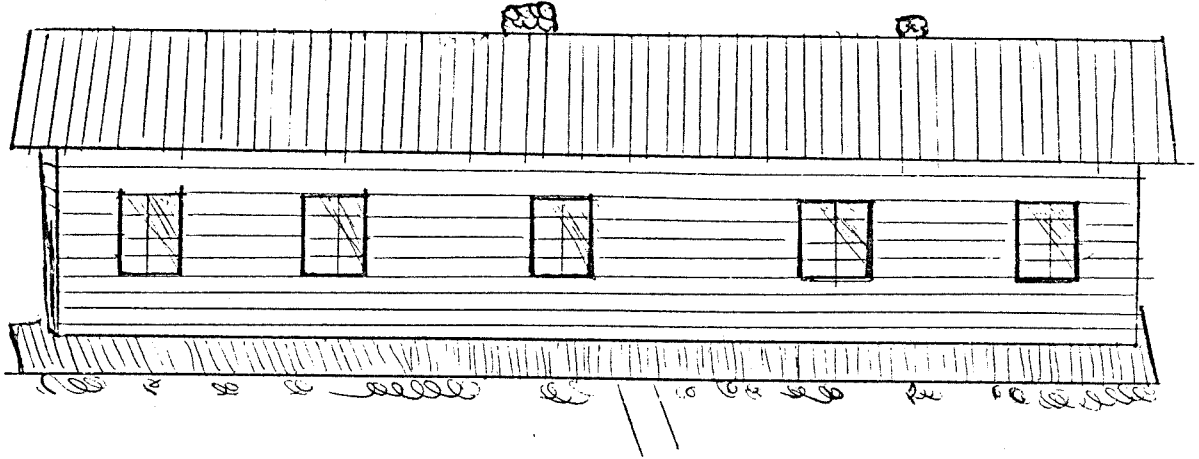
The Land was then leased to Frank AROA on 10th July 1913. Bernard PAYNE is now the present owner of the land as part of his farm.

Koru Road was only a dirt track in 1869 when timber was cut and sawn on the sight to build the monastery and shed by Fr. John ROLLAND and a few marist lay brothers.

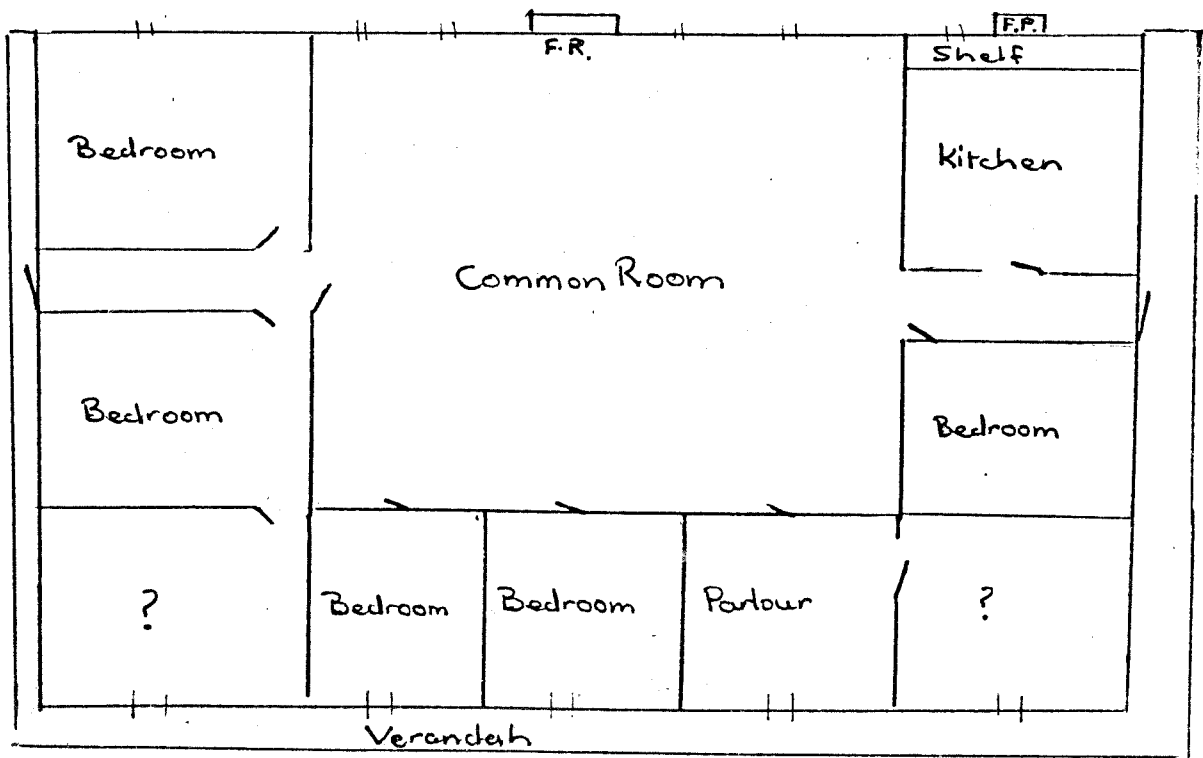
The board for the outer walls were overlapped and placed horizontally instead of the usual vertical and packed boards of that period. It had an iron roof which I could just make out from a family photograph taken of the Mace family with the shed and house in the corner. The building was around 60 feet long and 30 feet wide. It was unpainted and had a veränder along the front and both sides. The photograph showed a white picket fence surrounding the garden. Don't know if the fence was built with the monastery or afterwards, having cattle and sheep they possibly

did have a fence to keep them out of the vegetable garden.

The windows were small and around 4 feet high and 2 feet 6 inches wide with quote "several panes in each, common to that time", unquote. Makes me think of lead glass although they were not.



The two front corner rooms appear to be approached through the adjoining rooms and could possibly be a bedroom and a study or was one a pray room and with Fr. Rolland's advanced thinking was one a bathroom? There was one large fireplace in the common room and possibly a fireplace in the kitchen. Behind the main building they built a large wooden shed, of vertical weather boards and iron roof, about one foot lower than the house, and dug a well between 80 and 100 feet deep. There was a macracarpa tree beside the well and a limb still bore the scars from the bucket ropes in the 1960's, this tree, unfortunately, was chopped down for fire-wood about 10 years ago.



They planted an orchard down the steep valley on the northern side, cattle grazed at the back, and across the dirt road, they planted grape vines.

Further up the rise from the vines was situated the Koru cemetery. Surrounded by a wooden picket fence with 6 wooden headstones, that were there in the 1890's. This cemetery was not looked after, after the closing of the monastery and soon deteriorated into disrepair. One lady recalls taking the palings from the fence for firewood, when she was a little girl. There was also a large fire in the area around 1911 which I suppose finished off the wooden headstones,

Because of the lack of evidence of the burials it has been hard to obtain the names but they are as near to accuracy as follows:

CARPENTER, Still born male 7 July 1872, son of John & Hannah  
CARPENTER, Hannah, died 21 June 1873 aged 30 years.  
CARPENTER, 4 day infant died 22 June 1873, parents John & Hannah  
COSTELLO, Catherine, died 26 March 1885 aged 18 years.  
KELLY, Mary, died 5 July 1876 aged 55 years.  
McDAVITT, no other details  
MADGWICK, Ellen died 1891 aged 43 years.  
MARIN, Br. Elias Regis, died 24 or 30 April 1872.

The church records have 24 April and the death certificate shows 30 April 1872, also on death certificate his name was Francis Regis MARIN. I think in this case the church will be right. St. Joseph's church have only Costello and Marin's deaths in their records for this cemetery as Fr. Rollands second book of births and deaths has gone missing.

It appears the main aim of the monastery was more to house batchelor and widowed ex irish militiar men in the hope of converting them to marist brothers in time. There were about 12 of these lay brothers and one was named Philip PUTNAM an ex-drummer-bugler.

The only brother was Br. Elias Regis MARIN who was an excellant builder, gardener and vinegrower and who assumed all responsibilities when Fr. Rolland was away on fund raising trips.

Several boy pupils made up the rest of the boarders although nobody seems to know for certain how many or whom, except one named M. KAVANAGH of south Taranaki. Some sources say they were

orphans but have no proof of this.

Father JOHN BAPTISTE ROLLAND was an exceptionally energetic man and in all I have read of his activities, ambitions and achievements leaves me admiring him. With his advanced thinking he was possibly born before the world was ready for him.

In the days before the monastery he was with the soldiers during the maori battles, and not staying at the back for the wounded and dying to be brought to him, but up in the front line catching and attending to them as they fell, with his cheerful and courageous manner. In one fight he received 2 or 3 bullet holes in his large brimmed hat, fortunately he was not wounded. He used to march with the men with his long coat rolled up into a belt, wading through the rivers in his knee high leather boots, helping to keep up the spirit of the men.

Fr. Rolland helped with the commencing of other schools and churches in the area and I feel some memorial should be erected in the New Plymouth area in his memory before he is forgotten. He died in Reefton as Rev. Dean ROLLAND on 15th July 1908, of cancer.

There is no definite closing date to Koru monastery but it was around 1874. After Bishop VIARD died 2nd June 1872 there was a 2 year gap before his replacement and this unsettled period, the death of Br. Elias and Fr. Rolland still away raising funds probably contributed to its lacking of sufficient funds and eventual closing.

They have not recorded an actual starting date for Koru either, I suppose that in 1869 they took all the carpentry equipment necessary on a cart to the site and there things just commenced.

In 1915 when it was a farm house owned by the Mace family it caught on fire and all that remains now is an indentation in the ground, a stone base from the fireplace and a filled in well, Also in spring a few violets can be seen poking their faces out under the hedge. The vines had grown wild or died by the time the Mace's moved in, but the cherry trees were still there and by this time bearing fruit. Mrs. Hoskin (the Mace's daughter)

recalls her mother filling up the cart with cherries to be taken to town and the driver causing the horse to rear, which in turn tipped all the cherries onto Mrs. Mace and the road. Mrs. Mace senior managed to salvage enough for a cherry pie. Gosh you wouldn't know whether to laugh or cry.

Only one pear tree remains in the gully now. It seems a shame to think that the trees would not have been established to bear fruit while it was a monastery and the vines would have only just started to make some return. Given another 3 or 4 years they may have become self sufficient with their vegetable garden chickens, few sheep, cattle and fruit.

There is a branding iron with the letter JR in Mr. Payne's possession, could it have been Fr. Rollands?

Is it farewell to the Koru Monastery or will this help to preserve it remembrance forever.

Fr. Rolland.



Pat George, 1982.