

Historic injustice put right: Taranaki brothers added to war memorial a century on

Christina Persico 17:43, Nov 15 2019



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A ceremony was held at the Omata War Memorial to recognise two brothers whose names were left off the memorial. George and Herman Bollinger grew up near Omata and were killed in WWI.

Two Taranaki WWI soldiers who were left off a local memorial on suspicion of German sympathies have now been given their rightful recognition.

George and Herman Bollinger were born in New Zealand and grew up in the tiny town of Omata, just outside New Plymouth.

The brothers fought and died in World War I as Kiwi soldiers.

But when their hometown put up a memorial for the soldiers who served, their names were not included because of their father's German heritage.

One hundred years later Omata school principal Karen Brisco tasked a group of students to find how they could make it right for the one-time pupils of their school.



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Henrietta Bollinger, of Wellington, spoke on behalf of the Bollinger family.

Once the facts were confirmed they contacted the New Plymouth District Council to have the brother's names engraved the memorial.

On Friday, at a ceremony at the War Memorial, Brisco apologised for the actions of the community a century before.

She said the boys grew up in Omata, played with neighbours, and then fought for and died for New Zealand.



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Students Kyarne Broughton Pratt, Vaydim Noonan, Charnee Julian and Charlotte Butler worked on the project to have the brothers recognised.

"Prejudice at the time resulted in an injustice. It is fitting that the children of Omata School put this right, albeit 100 years later."

The Friday service saw the four students who worked on the project explain what their research had led them to do.

Charnee Julian, 13, described how they had contacted the Bollingers' descendants before Charlotte Butler, 12, unveiled the names.



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Charlotte Butler, 13, unveiled the names.

Vaydim Noonan, 13, read the Ode of Remembrance and Kyarne Broughton Pratt, 12, then read it again in te reo.

The song "It's A Long Way To Tipperary" was also sung, with one chorus changed to "It's a Long Way to Taranaki", and the senior class performed a haka.

Charlotte said the ceremony was very moving.



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The Bollinger brothers' names are now inscribed on the memorial.

"It really opened our eyes to see that there are things that go wrong and we need to change them."

Henrietta Bollinger - the great, great niece of Herman and George - spoke on behalf of the family, members of whom had come from across the North Island to attend.

It was her article about her uncles, published in a school journal, that led to the research project that brought about the addition of the two brothers' names.



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Relatives of the two men - Martin Pharazyn, Peter Pharazyn and Nick Bollinger - played and sung 'It's a Long Way to Tipperary'.

"You don't expect that people are going to pick your family stories up and run with them and find significance in them for themselves and their own community."

People had to be careful about not drawing boundaries around who did and who didn't count, she said.

"These two young men being rejected by their community - this to me is the community accepting them."

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