

Living Memorials

Pohutukawa at the National War Memorial



A deeper understanding

As an acknowledgement of the pohutukawa trees planted around the National War Memorial and Mount Cook area in Wellington, this booklet binds their stories together to help us form a deeper understanding of their significance.

The booklet is based on the research paper commissioned by the Memorial Park Alliance, to mark the development of the Pukeahu National War Memorial Park due to open on Anzac Day, 25 April 2015.



Spiritual meaning of the pohutukawa

The pohutukawa tree is a New Zealand icon with deep spiritual meaning for Māori, connecting the beginning and ending of human life.

In Māori mythology, the red flowers represent the blood of the warrior Tawhaki, a spirit ancestor who showed the way from earth to heaven but fell and died in doing so.

The gnarled pohutukawa at Cape Reinga, the northernmost tip of New Zealand, is known as “the place of leaping” from where the spirits of Māori journey to their traditional homeland of Hawaiki.

“ *the red flowers represent the blood of the warrior Tawhaki* ”



Pohutukawa bloom at the National War Memorial service to mark the winding up of the 28th Māori Battalion Association on 1 December 2012. Source: Ministry for Culture & Heritage. Photograph Andy Palmer 2012.

Barren site for the War Memorial

Following the settlement of Europeans in Wellington in 1840, the lush gardens leading down from Mount Cook (Pukeahu) toward the harbour began to disappear as the area was used to house the military, police, prisoners, brick works and schools.

The hill was barren when the National War Memorial Carillon tower was dedicated on Anzac Day, 25 April 1932, the anniversary of the landings at Gallipoli by the Australian and New Zealand troops. Of the 104,000 men and women who left New Zealand to serve in the First World War, 18,500 died - a huge price for a country of only one million at the time.

Mount Cook was chosen as a memorial museum precinct following World War I for its link with defence and its prominent site that could be seen from all round Wellington Harbour.



Crowds filled the empty spaces on the hill when the Carillon tower was dedicated on Anzac Day, 25 April 1932.

Source: Alexander Turnbull Library. Ref:1/1-020293-G. Photograph Sydney Charles Smith 1888-1972.

Pohutukawa trees provide the solution

After 1935 groups such as the Wellington Horticultural Society and the Wellington Beautifying Society embarked on a scheme to beautify the city.

The pohutukawa, also known as the New Zealand Christmas tree for its December flowering, was a popular choice because of its hardiness in harsh coastal conditions.

Governor-General Lord Galway and Lady Galway planted two pohutukawa trees near the base of the National War Memorial Carillon on Arbor Day, 7 August 1935.

Lord Galway told boys at nearby Wellington College there was no better way of beautifying surroundings than by planting trees and “clothing the somewhat arid hillsides”. He felt “very strongly that it was incumbent on everybody to do all they could”.

Evening Post 8 August 1935, P17



Bare land around the Carillon.

Source: Alexander Turnbull Library. Ref 1/1-037971-F. Photograph Crown Studios Wellington 1932.

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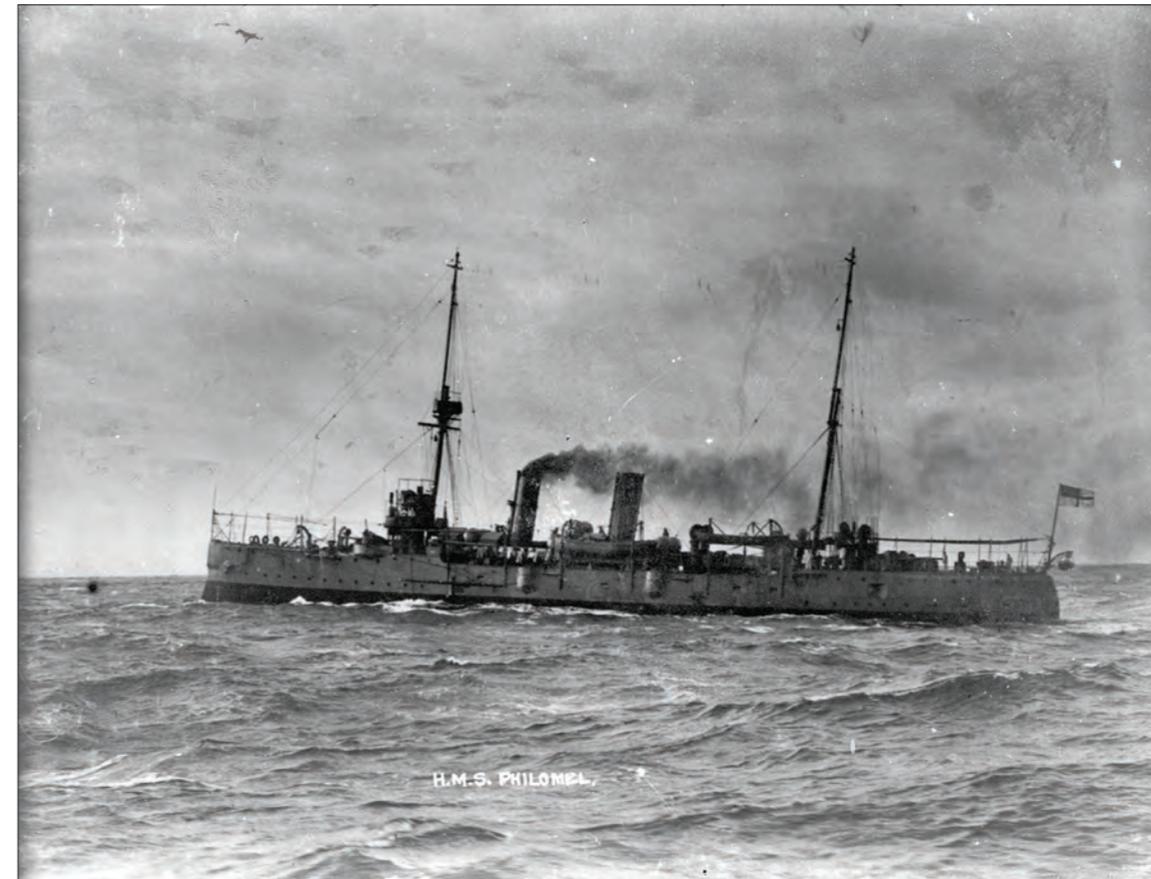
European New Zealanders adopted the Māori tradition of planting a pohutukawa to honour the dead soon after the arrival of the settlers in the 1840s.

In a ceremony to commemorate 16 men of the HMS Philomel, New Zealand's first warship, who died during World War 1, 16 pohutukawa trees were planted at the National War Memorial on 21 October 1936.

“*a live memorial was immeasurably better than a dead one*”

“...a live memorial was immeasurably better than a dead one, as the spirit of life in trees, and beholders of the future would link them in memories”.

William Parry, Minister of Internal Affairs, 1945.



Sixteen pohutukawa honour the 16 men from HMS Philomel who died in WWI.

Source: Alexander Turnbull Library. Ref: 1/2-017313-G. Photograph John Dickie.

Employed to plant pohutukawa

Under a government employment scheme started in 1938, trees were planted on the eastern bank of the Dominion Museum and National Art Gallery which had opened two years earlier.

At least 500 pohutukawa donated by the Wellington Beautifying Society were planted on 19 May 1938.

Until then the area beyond the Carillon tower had been mostly left untouched, except for the road kerbing and levelling that had taken place for the opening ceremony of the Carillon in 1932.

Overseeing the planting was Wellington City Council's Director of Parks and Reserves Mr J. G. MacKenzie who became known as "Pohutukawa Mac" for persuading garden groups and citizens to plant pohutukawa in Wellington suburbs.

Arbor Day 1940 also saw Governor-General Lord Galway and Lady Galway helping to plant a further 25 pohutukawa trees on the eastern bank.



Grounds being laid out in front of the Dominion Museum and National Art Gallery in 1936.

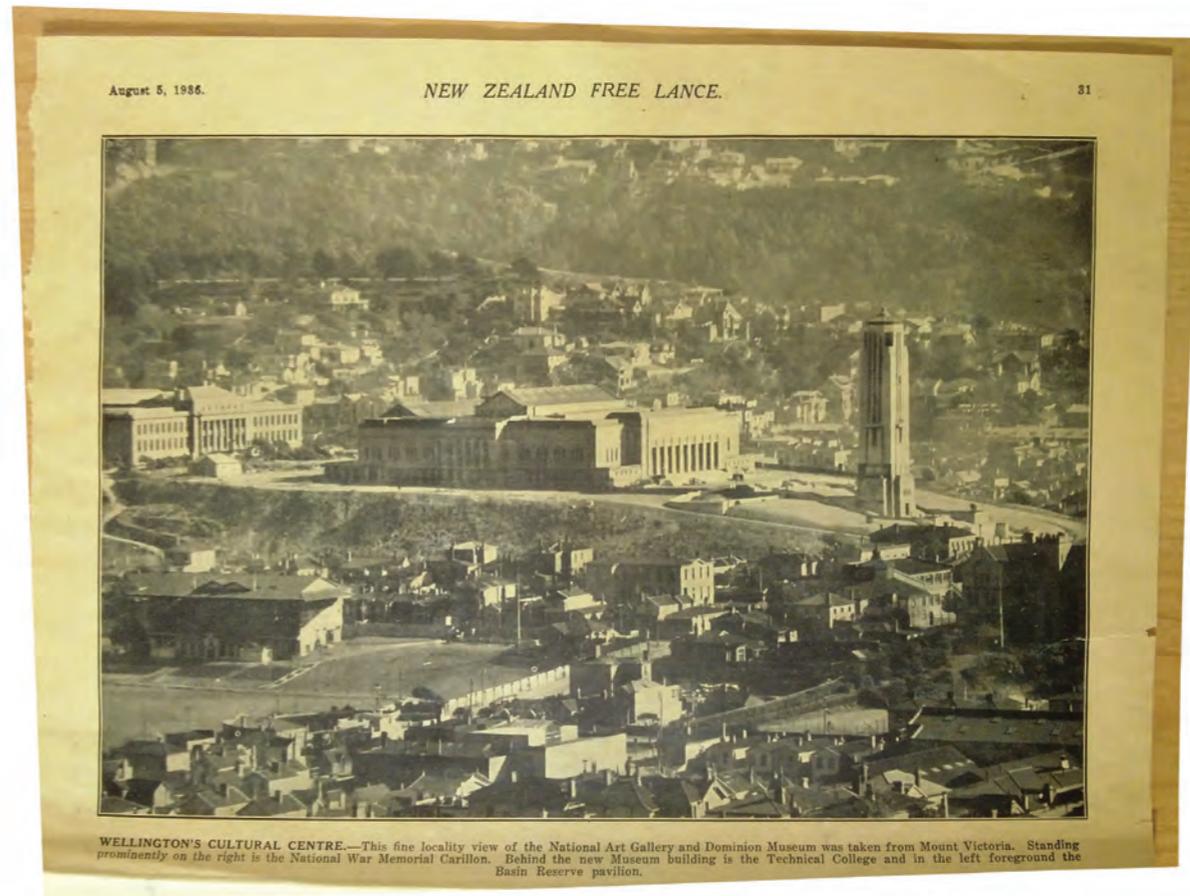
Source: Alexander Turnbull Library. Ref: PAColl-6301-35. Photograph Evening Post.

World War II years

During World War II the prominent Mt Cook hill was again occupied by the armed forces. On 8 June 1942 a large part of the Dominion Museum and National Art Gallery and its grounds was taken over for the Combined Operations Centre which installed underground air raid shelters.

By 1946, a year after the war ended, the museum had not been returned to civic use and the Government was criticised for not taking any action. The buildings and the grounds were described as a “disgraceful mess”.

It was not until after the Dominion Museum reopened in September 1949 that the grounds and gardens surrounding the building and the National War Memorial were rehabilitated.



The memorial museum precinct photographed from Mt Victoria.
Source: Te Papa Archives. MU000219/001/0021. New Zealand Freelance 1936.

Red flowers for fallen warriors

As Mount Cook recovered from World War II, the nation was still scarred by the loss of 11,928 men and women who had served in the war. For a nation of 1.6 million people, this was the highest percentage of war deaths per population in the Commonwealth.

During the war, Wellington's Te Atiawa iwi formed an important connection with the Pacific Islands through the marriage of a prominent Te Atiawa descendant and a Rarotongan ariki (chief).

When the Pacific Island volunteers fought for New Zealand they were sometimes enlisted in the 28th Māori Battalion. With a long history between Te Atiawa iwi and the Pacific Island people, it was appropriate to acknowledge the service of Pacific Island volunteers in a distinctive way.

Pacific Island people celebrate their warriors with red flowers so in recognition of the fallen Pacific Island volunteers, Te Atiawa iwi planted pohutukawa all over Wellington, in particular at the National War Memorial.



The 28th Māori Battalion arriving at Wellington following WWII.
Source: Alexander Turnbull Library. Ref: 1/4-001635-F. Photograph John Dobree Pascoe.

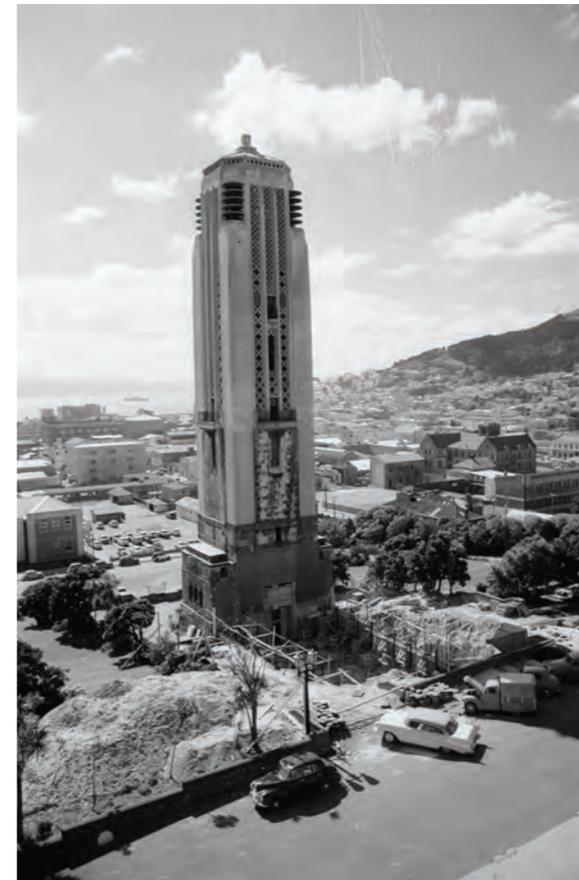
Hall of Memories

The long-awaited Hall of Memories was officially opened on 5 April 1964, built below the Carillon as the second part of the National War Memorial.

The pohutukawa trees planted in earlier years surrounded the memorial as a mature stand of trees.

Following the removal of a pohutukawa by the Carillon Committee to improve the view of the Carillon for a royal visit which was later cancelled, staff at the Dominion Museum sought to improve future communication involving tree planting and removal.

“ pohutukawa trees surrounded the memorial as a mature stand of trees ”



The National War Memorial Carillon with the Hall of Memories under construction, 30 March 1961.

Source: Alexander Turnbull Library. Ref: EP/1961/0964/10-F.

Photo Evening Post.

A move to Te Papa

By the 1980s the Dominion Museum and National Art Gallery had outgrown its building and was transferred to the new Te Papa Tongarewa building on Wellington's waterfront.

It was agreed that a pohutukawa tree would be removed from the grounds and be replanted at Te Papa. The company in charge of the process took 11 days to achieve the move because of the tree's deeply embedded roots.

A removal ceremony on 26 October 1995 was led by Koro Sam Raumati of Te Atiawa and other kaumatua representing the Taranaki iwi that migrated to Wellington in the early 1800s. The pohutukawa arrived safely at Te Papa accompanied by iwi members on 3 November 1995.



Te Atiawa kaumatua from left, Te Ru Wharehoka, Ted Tāmami and Koro Sam Raumati at the ceremonial removal of the pohutukawa.

Source: Te Papa Tongarewa 1995

“ *This is just one way that Te Atiawa continues to maintain the relationship between our taonga and the land. By moving the pohutukawa tree to the place where our taonga reside, the spiritual safety of our nation’s treasures is being preserved.* **”**

Liz Mellish, Te Atiawa



The pohutukawa tree as it is today at Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa following its ceremonial removal from the Dominion Museum and National Art Gallery in 1995.

Source: Memorial Park Alliance. Photograph Colin McLellan 2014.

Pukeahu National War Memorial Park

Pohutukawa trees will be a symbolic feature of the plantings throughout the Pukeahu National War Memorial Park.

Within the park an area to be known as the Tangata Whenua Gardens is being constructed on either side of the National War Memorial beneath the established pohutukawa trees.

The gardens celebrate the special relationship between Māori and Pakeha and will include plantings, paved areas, rock features and a sculpture of cultural significance.



Artist's impression of planting within the Memorial Park.
Source: Ministry for Culture and Heritage. Stantiall Studios 2013.



Cover photo: Arts, Culture and Heritage Minister Christopher Finlayson and Governor-General Sir Jerry Mateparae pay their respects at the Tomb of the Unknown Warrior. Source: Ministry for Culture & Heritage. Photograph Andy Palmer 2012.

Memorial Park Alliance members

