

NORTHLAND STORIES



A Koanga Booklet

Kay Baxter

With lots of help from Logan Forrest

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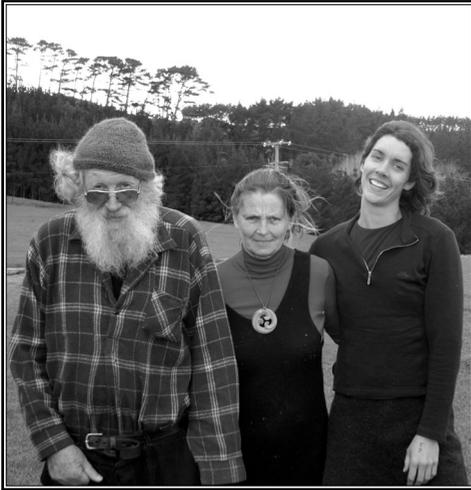
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This book is dedicated to Logan Forrest who died soon after my last visit to see him just before I wrote the last draft of this book. Thank you Logan for all you gifted to our family, and to Koanga.

INTRODUCTION

No matter who we are or where we have come from, the stories of our food plants are inextricably linked with our own stories, our own whakapapa... they are us. The Koanga Institute has been actively looking for, collecting, saving and making available to the public again, the old fruit trees and vegetable seeds of Northland and other areas since 1982, and as I write this, for nearly 40 years.

I get that this is far from a complete story, but feel it is important to pass on the stories and understandings that have been passed to me even with gaps. Maybe some information in here will help fill a 'gap' of yours! And I would love to hear from you if you have information that helps fill my gaps!

The purpose of this booklet is to connect you with the history rather than the details about individual trees. You can find specific information about the trees on the Knowledgebase on the Koanga website, in *Design Your Own Orchard*, my *Design Your Own Forest Garden Booklet*, the Koanga YouTube channel, and in our fruit tree catalogues.

Those of us who have been working with these trees, or those of us lucky enough to have somebody in our family who still has old trees down the back of the garden, will understand what I mean when I say that you can just tell when you eat this fruit, that it nourishes us in ways that are hard to explain or describe, other than that it is a feeling, connected to taste somehow, and also connected to whakapapa.

Over the past few years we have seen many scientific studies, even here in NZ showing that our heritage food plants contain many times the nutrition of modern varieties, that have been bred for other purposes than nourishing people! For example, the work of the Central Tree Crops Research Trust.

The amazing research of Weston Price in the 1920s -30s and the new science of Epigenetics also clearly shows us the links between nutrition and disease. It is time to take action, and choose in every way we can, to eat food that actually nourishes us.

A great place to begin is by planting heritage fruit trees and vegetables in your own back yard.

This Booklet contains information and stories gifted to me on my travels collecting old fruit trees and vegetables originally in Northland, and I am deeply indebted to all of those souls who kept these stories alive, and had the trust to pass them to me (when they didn't really even know me) that we might still hear them today. Especially to Logan Forrest from Pouto, an avid historian and plant collector who has been the connector for four generations of the McLeods, of McLeods Bay, (Sheehans Creek) Pouto, and who has also been the connector from the past out to many many others who did not know the stories. Logan has helped me edit this booklet to be sure I have things as correct as we believe them to be.

Our family visited his place many times over the past 30 odd years, and have wonderful memories of the old McLeod homestead surrounded by trees of all kinds and ornamentals planted in that bay by his ancestors, amongst the early settlers to arrive in the Kaipara Harbour. It burnt down recently, a sad end of a long story there, but like so many other old homestead sites, the trees, shrubs and ornamentals remain to tell the story. We also have fond memories of his old batch which still exists (just), which has a jetty leading out from the front door over the harbour at high tide, mudflats at low.

The Shorthorn cows on Logan's farm were cows that swam ashore from the shipwreck of the Tory on the Pouto Bar in 1840. By 1860 his grandfather Isaac McLeod was known to have a substantial herd of Strawberry, Strawberry Roan, and Red Shorthorns, with Logan McLeod bringing in the White Shorthorns later. The Romney ewes on this farm were also descendants of sheep that swam ashore from the wreck of the Tory.

His sense of who he is, is profoundly connected to his knowledge of the history and the stories of everything around him... and his sense of connection is reflected in the work he does now for the future. It has been Logan that has given me the overview. I'm so grateful Logan so graciously spent so much time with me, when he knew so much, and it took me ages to get my head around it all.

I would also like to thank Jim and June Cox, Ken Vincent, Puss Chadwick, Bert Davies, Mavis Smith, and Errol Jones, and many others, whose stories are in the introduction to *Design Your Own Orchard*.

When I began collecting these stories along with the old trees I was in my early 30s, I wasn't one of the elders telling the story! Peter Yardley wasn't one of the elders either, but he was one of the story tellers, and like me he is now one of the elders to whom the knowledge was passed, and whose job it is to share it! He is a fisherman who lives on the harbour, fed his children, and now feeds his grandchildren from the fruit of the old abandoned orchards and soaked up the stories. It is by living the simple life, in touch with and dependent on the natural world that one feels connected to this land, ancestors and the ecology and it is out of that we will learn once again to honour the whole and lead a regeneration process, into the future.

Finally I would like to say that I am not a historian, I am not a scientist, not an archaeologist and have no other official capacity, I am a gardener and a listener. Some of the things I have heard and repeat here do not match the accepted history of this land. I do not wish to make judgements about that but just to repeat, and ponder, and feel what is coming from the people and the trees!



The earliest European Fruiting Trees I know of in this land happen to be in Northland!

In the 1970s Logan Forrest, a farmer, historian and avid plant collector from Pouto, saved an old olive tree from being cut down by the Department of Conservation in the reserve at Pouto Point, by standing with his arms around it. He knew it was a special tree, and he physically stood with his arms around it and prevented it from being cut down (D.O.C cut down trees that are not native trees, even when they are super special heritage food plants!).

At that point in the 1970s the tree was carbon dated and shown to be older than 200 years. The accepted story of the settlement of NZ by Europeans did not, and still does not, include any hint that we were being visited in the 1770s or earlier by people who may have planted olive trees!

One does not have to look far for stories of earlier visits than current history acknowledges, up the West Coast of Northland. I heard them constantly on my travels over 30 years in that area.

The Spanish and Portuguese were sailing around the world in the 1500-1600s travelling to the Dutch East Indies to pick up spices. If they were blown off track it is highly likely they would have found NZ because when you come around Cape York under sail the currents actually drag you to the West Coast of the North Island of NZ. There are many stories that have been passed down orally to today, of visits and shipwrecks along this coast by the Portuguese and Spanish, including many stories of physical evidence as well, including Portuguese helmets in caves and a Spanish ship's altar in the bush and shipwrecks etc., as well as people whose whakapapa goes back to these Spanish and Portuguese travellers.

Logan believes (based on a lifetime of listening and looking at evidence around the North) that it was the Spanish who were whaling around our coast during the 1770s - 1790s and it was probably them who planted the olives at Pouto. During this period the Spanish and Portuguese (Dutch East India Company) were also sailing regularly between South America and Europe via the Dutch East Indies.

Whatever the real story is, these old olives at Pouto are possibly the first trees planted by Europeans in NZ.

For that reason alone they are very special, however they also turned out to be excellent quality olives and anybody who now grows a J series olive tree (J5 is the most well-known) can know that their trees come from this ancient tree at Pouto originally. They are great oil olives and also OK picklers.

These olives are now growing wild all around the coast in the Pouto area, including all down the sides of the road as you drive down. There is a lot of variation in the fruit, some are huge like large Greek olives, and best pickled, and others are small, and better for oil. All the huge old trees overhanging the beach at Pouto are outstandingly beautiful trees, well worth visiting, simply to dream of how they got there, who they were important to, and to feel the majesty and beauty of a 250+ year old olive tree! And even to feel what an environment where olives and peaches self seed and grow wild, is like. If you can't get there to see then check out a video I made of them in winter 2019 on the Koanga YouTube page.

The grandfather of them all, the one carbon dated to be over 200 years in 1970, is the one standing in the reserve just before the beach with a hollow trunk. A hollow trunk like it has, is also a sign of great age. 200 years before 1970 puts it as having been planted by at least 1770. Keep in mind as you read this that if Captain Cook first visited this land in 1769, as our history tells us, then how did that olive tree find its way to the Pouto Reserve, somewhat back from the beach, at or well before that date?

Koanga is keeping alive and making available to the public, when we can, three of these trees:

1. The oldest tree we call 'The Grandfather'. It is the father of the J series of olives in this land and is great for oil and pickling although not large. It was tested by the DSIR in the 1960s, and 70s and was found to have extremely high quality oil.
2. We call this one 'The Cliff Tree' as it was huge and growing on the cliff at the beach and falling over the cliff in a stunningly beautiful way. It was a very old tree as well, but has now been cut out by DOC, as it fell over the beach. It was a dual purpose olive, good for both oil and pickling as it was larger than the 'Grandfather'.
3. Our third tree was growing on the track down to the beach amongst many others but had large Greek type fruit. We call this the 'Greek' olive, and it has also gone now.

An interesting story passed also from Logan's research (Samuel Marsden's diary and also a family story from *The Olive Branch*) shows that in 1814-15 Samuel Marsden was 'sniffing' around the coast looking for Kauri spars for the British admiralty. These spars were probably being sent to Hong Kong where the British had shipyards.

The Maori took him (Marsden) to Waihi where he met a man called de Silva, (Spanish gentleman!) who had a trading store in Gisborne, where he was trading with the Maori (Marsden specifically mentions kauri gum being traded), and whaling.

At that time he (de Silva) had a Maori wife and fully grown sons, so had been living here for some time (if they were 20-30 at that time then de Silva must have been there since at least 1780-90s if not earlier. This does not fit the story our history books tell us either).

It is also known that he had a trading partner Manuel (*The Olive Branch*) in Kaitaia and there are old olive trees in both places that were suspected to be 130-140 years old in the 1970s. Logan thinks that they originally settled and created a trading post near Gisborne then later Waihi and then Manuel took his family to Kaitaia where at both places there are also old olive trees. I had a student once turn up at a workshop I was teaching and introduced himself as an ancestor of de Silva! And he was from the East Cape.

The book *The Olive Branch* talks about several Spanish traders being dropped off in NZ around 1740-50 to establish trading branches and Marsden says in his diaries that he met men who were born in NZ, trading whales, seal skins, and kauri timber spars in early 1800s (they must have been here for 30 years at least I would guess, putting the date back at least to 1770).



The last part of the walk down to the beach at Poua, with old olives and peaches on the left.



Looking along the beach at Pouto, some of the last remaining ancient olives are still to be seen, falling off the cliffs!



This is the oldest tested olive tree in NZ, the grandfather of the J5 series in the park behind the beach at Pouto.



The base of the old J5 grandfather olive.



An old fig at Pouto.

Old Sea Captains, and the Whalers and Sealers 1780-1840

Around 1780 and onwards there were many ships trading and traveling around the world calling in here... ships coming from England regularly carrying convicts to Australia, often called into NZ, as well as the 'yanks' who had whaling stations well established here at the time...

Many of the old captains on these boats were looking for special places to retire or settle.

The code of the day for all of those Sea Captains was 'survival at all costs' and part of their strategy was to carry animals (goats and pigs) and food plants that could be dropped off and left to grow and multiply, in case of future shipwreck or need. They were also consummate traders, always picking up and dropping off.

Logan has been looking hard at where our very early heritage food plants actually originated, and it is likely that the Lisbon lemon is a fruit that came out of China and connected with the Spanish whalers and traders and early ship captains, travelling the oceans very early on. Logan also found a reference to the Maori trading Lisbon lemons with the ships, in the Bay of Islands in 1820, well before the missionaries arrived there. Lisbon lemons grown from seed, take a few years to produce a lot of fruit so to be trading in lemons the Maori must have had well established trees.

It feels there is a good chance that lemons arrived with the very early Ship Captains as a cure for scurvy, and trees were well established by 1820. In 1820 Williams and Marsden had started a nursery in the Bay of Islands, and they were using Lisbon lemon seeds as rootstock for their citrus!

Logan Forrest thinks it is possible that peach tree seeds came out of China in the 16th and 17th century with the Dutch East India Trading Company ships, and possibly others, and that the peach trees were in NZ well before the missionaries arrived, probably in the holds of the earliest ship captains, potentially with the Spanish whalers, or even on Spanish or Portuguese shipwrecks up the West Coast... certainly here by the time of the whalers and sealers, around 1790s.

There were stories of mature peach trees on what became known as Peach Island in Whangaroa harbour 1805, when the Boyd sank there.

Samuel Marsden was reputed to have been among the first European settlers in NZ (1812-15) but even in his diary notes, we see that everywhere he went around the coast he saw old Sea Captains already settled, with large orchards and gardens. These large old orchards became very famous, e.g. the one at Midge Bay near Pouto, and they fed many people around the areas where they were planted, including the local Maori and the first waves of early settlers who were the next to arrive in Northland.

The legacy of the Sea Captains' remains today in many very old plantings including Ponderosa pines and macrocarpas. (Both out of Oregon, the American traders had a huge influence on the early plantings). This pine handles salt winds, salt water, and the timber from old trees was very resinous timber, lasting 40 years without being treated.

Some of the other trees that were in most of the old ship captains plantings were Lisbon lemons, plums (including the Burbank which also came from China and Japan), seedling pears, quinces and apples, (because seeds travelled better than trees around the world in ships holds).

Forsythe & Co. came to the Kaipara from the Hokianga, on the first European ship into the Kaipara in 1832. Plums and peaches were already well established there, because in 1833 Reverend Buller was saying he would make Christmas plum pudding with the plums that were ripe, and Marsden noted in his diary that there were peaches around the Kaipara at this time.

One of the original trading depots on the Kaipara can still be seen at Tauhara Creek, built by Captain Sheehan.

Tauhara Creek was first settled and planted by Captain Sheehan in the 1840s. He had a beautiful garden still evident in the 1980s when I first saw it, and it had been well maintained by the Dalmatian Franich fisherman family, and still is. Plants that survive there today from Captain Sheehan include Osage Oranges (planted to provide dowel wood for mending and building boats), Pink Naked ladies, Agapanthus, Blue and White, Pink single gladioli, yellow Woolly mullein, several roses honeysuckle, Watsonia, Montebello, Apple quince, pear, peaches.

There were also many other food plants and ornamentals that came with the old sea captains, including mustard cabbage (known by Northland Maori in 1980 as Ruruhau), (silverbeet was unknown in NZ in those days) maize,

oats, wheat, potatoes, rhubarb, beans, Triamble pumpkins and onions. They also brought many ornamentals because of the Sea Captains connections with the East India Trading Company, and European collectors in China at the time including Osage orange, South African and Chinese Flowers including Lion's tail, Buttercup tree, Chinese lanterns, buddleia, chrysanthemum and hydrangea, which often outlived the old homesteads they were planted around! European puha also came very early back into the 1700s, another one that possibly came because it prevented scurvy for the sailors and travellers.



The original trading store in McLeods Bay built by Captain Sheehan around 1840. This is what it looked like in 2000.



Captain Sheehan's trading store.

Missionaries and Traders 1800s-1840s

Throughout this period the frequency of the arrival of ships from England, Scotland, America etc. increased, with much recorded history especially of the arrival and work of the missionaries, for whom survival was just as important as it was for the early Ship Captains, and all of them would have arrived with their own food plants.

It was common for the ships originating in England, Scotland and European places to call in at South Africa on their way here to pick up fresh plant material because many of the items they carried from their homelands perished going through the tropics, (too hot and humid), and South Africa had been colonised 100 years earlier, so there was a lot of plant material established there from the homelands. A good example is the Marabella plum, well known in Europe, but it came here via South Africa. They also travelled via the Americas to NZ so plant material came from all around the world to this land very early on. For example, the Isabella grape. (Apparently the earlier Spanish and Portuguese ships did not call in there because they didn't get on with the Dutch).

We know from the diaries of Marsden and Reverend White that as they moved into and around the Kaipara in the 1820s there were already large areas of peaches well established.

Rev. William White is reputed to have moved on around the Kaipara over the following 20 years and was next recorded at the Mission Station with Bennet at Midge Bay where there was already a full orchard of peach trees, and plums, apples in the 1820s.

The Rev. William White was also known to have owned a 2.5 acre orchard at Te Kopuru where he also had a spar station (trading in Kauri spars) from 1838-1842, and he was situated at Port Albert from 1845-1855, and Hoteo Point from 1855-1865. Port Albert has been and still is a veritable treasure chest for heritage tree collectors.

Waikare Creek, Okara Creek, Punakere Creek, Kellys Bay are all old sea captain settlements of the Kaipara from the 1820s that became associated with Maori Mission stations (Okara), gumdiggers (Punakere) and pilot stations (Okere) and Maori settlements (obviously the Maori settlements came first, and were later joined by the Ship Captains etc.).

Okara, Tangitiki and Te Wharau were all associated with Stephenson who had Stephenson's Spar Depo at Te Wharau, all settlements with large orchards. Stephenson's spar business saw 8-10 ships a year loaded and he employed a man as lookout for bringing ships pilot in. He leased land at Midge Bay as look out in 1838.

Stevenson had a trading station and spar station at Te Whare and Rev. William White, helped set up the mission station at Tangiteroria in 1830s and surveyor and explorer Pollock, noted in 1831, that at the Mission Station at Tirau, Tangiteroria, there was a large garden with kumara, potatoes, Indian corn, cabbages, shallots, garlic, turnips, yams and wheat, as well as plentiful peaches, pears, apples, quince and plums.

Rev. Buller, the Wesleyan missionary at Tangiteroria visited Catholic mission up the valley in 1845 and noticed a large old fig. He was organizing timber to build the Catholic church at Te Wharau, where the timber was coming from, and he noticed they were loading up with fig cuttings as part payment for timber... where did the Catholics get the figs from? Pompallier came out of France, 10 years earlier than the Dalmatians arrived and possibly brought figs out at that point. All ancient civilizations where figs could be grown recognized them as a secure sugar source and so were important trading items in early days.

Not many of these old vegetable cultivars survived until the 20th century but certainly there were fruit trees surviving in old orchards around Northland and Jim Cox was living near the old Mission station at Tangiteroria and he collected many heritage trees from there and further afield in Northland during his lifetime.

Because Northland was settled by the harbours and waterways, in the 20th century when the railway and then the roads went through, the original settlements and homesteads became very isolated. This isolation along with Northland having rough terrain and little large scale industrial agriculture/ horticulture rolling over it, meant many of these trees survived, at least more than in many other places. The East Cape, East Coast is similar.

I visited Jim and June Cox many times between 1980 and 2005. Jim was another wonderful plant collector and historian who lived at Tangiteroria for most of his working life. He was an entomologist with the forest service but was passionate about collecting heritage fruit trees along with their stories, and

Koanga holds some of the special Northland fruit trees from his collection. Many of the trees in his collection came from the very early missionaries plantings all around Northland. It was Jim who passed us the Marabella plum with its story from South Africa and it was Jim who told me the story about the Spanish ship's altar an elderly gentleman found growing in the bush one day with a tree growing right through it that aged the altar at the time the Spanish were travelling the world... Other trees in the Collection from Jim are Irish Peach apple, the Mayflower apple, Victoria plum, and the small yellow round Zambesi Gem pumpkins.

The stories surviving to today, talk of very large orchards at the Marine Dept. site at Pouto Point from 1870s, planted by Captain Chamberlain, which fed people for miles, including Maori and later the gum diggers. Before the 1860s, ships came in over the southern bar and traded to Helensville, after that bar closed up the ships came in over the Northern bar and traded up the Northern Wairoa. The Marine Point light was established in the 1870s, so this could happen. The Marine Dept. bought into Pouto Point about 1870. They had tried earlier but Maori wouldn't sell them land because that was their main growing area and it was easy to trade with ships from there, providing firewood, water, and produce. A large orchard had been planted here very early by the Maori.

There is a Christmas lily growing wild in the sand dunes of Tauhara Creek that came from Midge Bay. Today it is called the Midge Bay lily by locals. Midge Bay is a bay on the inside of the Kaipara bar where the ships had to drop ballast before going up the Wairoa River. Many plants entered this land from the ballast dumps outside harbours and from Midge Bay we have the lilies (*Lilium regale/longifolium*), gorse, Danthonia, Serra Della clover, Green Gladioli (look like orchids). Apparently there were large mountains of ballast rock accumulated at Midge bay and it was barged, thousands of loads, to build the walls in Cornwall Park in Auckland and also crushed to build roads with, and also built the seawall at Helensville.

Some of the most special peaches in our collection come from these very old white fleshed peaches that have been around in Northland since at least the 1800s, and were well established and well spread around by the end of this era of the missionaries and traders getting established.

Having spent so many years working with and eating these peaches I often wondered just what the original peaches were like that came to this land originally, and whether they have thrown 'sports' since coming here, so that we now have unlimited variations on the what we call the Kaipara River white fleshed peach. Forty years ago when I began this journey I could still see very distinct valley systems that each held their own variation on this old white fleshed peach, or so it seemed to me. The valley systems were often associated with marae and whanau, and each whanau knew their old peaches well. Although these old peaches are relatively genetically stable I imagine over 250-300 years now of self seeding in this land, which they do easily, and growing many new generations the whanau may have noticed differences and kept those that ripened earlier or later or somehow differently and over time developed a range of peaches as well as a line or more distinct from another valley system. With far less peach trees around today and far more of the industrial world over-laid upon this land it is not possible to see this kind of pattern anymore.

Occasionally I come across a peach that I have never ever seen before, that is obviously a variation on the old Kaipara River peach theme.

That happened to me when we lived in Te Whanau a Apanui. Along the coast there they have a very old, well known peach they call Korako. It is different to all other old white fleshed peaches I have seen. It is small, white skinned, no significant red on the skin, clingstone and so tender it bruises when you pick it. It is also super sweet, juicy and delicious. It is a home orchard peach only! The whakapapa of that tree goes back to the earliest ship captains and traders along the coast, possibly the Spanish traders who we believed were trading between Gisborne and Waihi calling in at Ohiwa harbour in the 1780s.

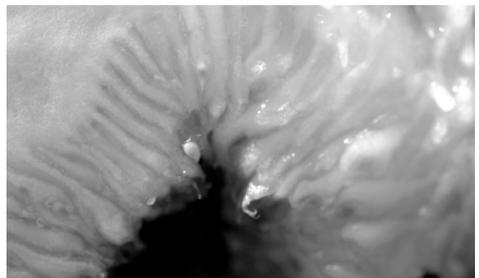
In 2000 a group of us held the International Permaculture Convergence in Kaiwaka, and one of the very special memories of that conference for me came from a workshop I held sitting on bales of hay in our woolshed. An attendee from Nepal told us that the peaches that were ripe at the time at our place (The River Peaches) were the same as the original old peaches from Nepal. So my imagination tells me that these old peaches came out of Nepal or China at the period of the Dutch East India Trading Company travelling the world at that time when China was opening up to plant collectors. These peaches must have come out to the rest of the world at that time and by 1800 were well established around Northland. Over many generations of peach seedlings

germinating and growing slight alterations in their characteristics were noticed and selected and so we came to have various forms of the old original peaches from Nepal all around this land by the time I began collecting them, including, we think, our:

- Otamatea River peach
- Pouto River peach
- 4 Winds peach
- Te Kooti (this peach is from the original orchard of Te Kooti in Ohiwa harbour)
- Mary's Christmas. This peach was planted from seed by Mary Williams from the huge old original orchard at the Lighthouse at North Head Point, that was cut out later by DOC.
- Batley peach
- Christina peach



Mary's Christmas peach, an original peach from the old peach groves at the light house at the head of the Kaipara. Planted before Samuel Marden arrived.



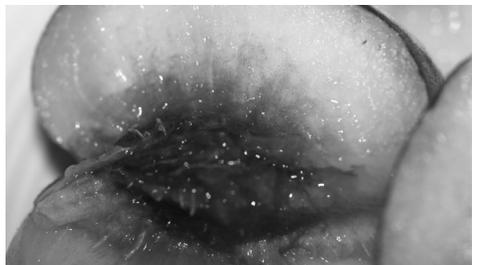
Batley fig from the old fish cannery, Roadley homestead.



This is the old historic places trust house at Batley owned by Rex Roadley. This was the house next to the old fish cannery on the Kaipara, one of the early industries until they fished it out. Batley house still had a lot of old plant material growing right up around it and in the old orchard when I visited in the 1990s. We still sell the batley peach, it is our latest fruiting peach and it's flowers are distinctly different to all others I know of. They are small, darker and very cupped.



Super unusual flowers of the Batley peach.



Batley peach from the Roadley homestead at the site of the original fish canning factory.

Early Settlers 1810-1870s

The first rush of settlers in New Zealand came in the form of timber merchants and mill workers around 1810. Some of them became our earliest gum diggers. During the period from the 1850s to the 1860s there was a constant stream of ships bringing the new wave of settlers from England, Ireland, Scotland and further afield. They were mainly stock farmers and business people from England who often left home with huge collections of plants. Many hundreds, if not thousands of varieties of the early settlers' favourite apples, pears, plums etc. came into NZ at this time in our history.

During this period the Mathew Brothers, Charles and James, arrived in NZ to set up what was the first commercial nursery in Australasia (just down the road from Ascension vineyard, near Matakana today). Charles and James' father Patrick was the Laird of Gourdie manor in Scotland from the age of 17, and Errol Estate where he and his wife Christian lived was said to have held 10,000 fruit trees in its 43 acres. Patrick Mathew was an arborist and spent many years making annual trips to Europe seeking trading partners for Tay produce and collecting plant material for his nurseries. Patrick Mathew was well aware of the poverty and sickness in the slums of the cities as the Industrial revolution took control, and his solution for the sick and the poor was to find sponsorship amongst the rich to help the poor emigrate.

Patrick became the convener, promoter and chairman of the Scots New Zealand Land Company, supporting people in Britain, Ireland, Nova Scotia and Bohemia to emigrate to NZ.

When Charles and James arrived in Matakana to establish their nursery they had a huge amount of knowledge and support from their father back in Scotland. The Mathew Brothers nursery became a very special and influential nursery in terms of what plant material was available through Northland over the following 100 years, and even on what remains as heritage plant material today. I absolutely love the words sent to me by Errol Jones in march 1992, where she painted a picture that will always remain in my mind's eye when I think of the old nurseries and orchards during this time, and also as I plan and design our orchards of the future:

Letter to Kay from Mrs Errol Jones, 31st March 1992

Recently I heard your 'Nurseries' mentioned by a talk-back host on the radio and I commend you for establishing a nursery for the older varieties of fruit. The only diseases our orchards had in the 1920s was leech and codling moth (which we sprayed arsenate of lead, lime, and bluestone with a 30ft wand and a stirrup pump). The pear trees were so tall we had to bind 2 ladders together to harvest the fruit. In 1920 the pears were 65 years old and probably older because they came in barrels from Britain and Europe.

The Matthew brothers nursery was the first extensive commercial nursery in Australasia and established in 1855 as soon as ground was cleared at upper Matakana. Their pit sawn shingled cottage, the first built upstream, though there were two or three houses on the coast at Brick Bay, Sandspit (Lower Matakana) and Million or Wann Bay (on ridge between). The brothers planted (gradually) seven raying orchards from the central nursery on the floor of the strath (exploded as to spraying and harvesting times). They planted a large arboretum of pines (mainly one specimen, Scot's pine) under which grew laburnum, crataegus rosea (double). The single, cream-flowered hawthorn was used for hedges with shaddock, privet, hakea, hazelnut, chestnut and specimen trees of horse chestnut, ash, many poplars, oaks cypress, elms alders, wattle, yew, sycamore, holly, and several osiers, including the cuttings they had taken from Napoleon's empty grave on St Helena in early 1854. A piece of this weeping willow was added as a bonus to every order received from every port and island, and the local area, as this nursery was the nucleus of all local orchards. There were orchard trees at Bay of Islands and Tauranga but, as yet, in 1855, no nursery for commerce. The father of the Matthew brothers lived at Errol by Lay and owned the largest orchard in Scotland (43 acres, 10,000 trees). He travelled extensively in Europe and selected flora for his sons of every imaginable kind. He was Chairman of the Scots NZ Land Co of the 1830s and had purchased the Manukau to Waitemata isthmus for Scottish settlement, 90,000 acres (more or less) for 9,00 sterling. The agent was drowned! The crown stepped in and eventually chose the area for the new capital! The claim was annulled by the 1840 Treaty! (This was the same era that Wakefield claimed from Wanganui south and most of the South Island) The story is long and involved but the Scottish Company folded... and those who arrived on the 'Brilliant' 1841 found they had no land when they got here. This is the background of the Matthew Brothers of upper Matakana! Their block stretched from the Omaha river almost to the head of the tidal Matakana river. They used both rivers for the transport of

their plants and fruit by Meekejohn or Davich scows. They donated the Cemetery, and the roads which trisect their block and the younger brother brought the present highway from Warkworth at the falls of the Mahurangi river, through Matakana at the falls of its river, to the falls of the Omaha river.

There were two immense landscaped gardens, 1855 and 1876. They were on the skirt of opposite braes and below the two residences – the first cottage (similar to the miners cottage), and the second when the younger brother married, was the four-square painted-roof house. These two park-like gardens were show pieces for purchases of garden flora. The strath was far more glorious than the mansion house garden, but as no scribe passed there were no reports. Those who came to the Matakana upper wharf continued straight north on what was then the eastern highway from Auckland over the Whangaripo hill. (The west highway commenced at Riverhead.)

The Matthew Bros and George Grey became good friends and visits were reciprocated and plants exchanged. The Matakana garden was at least four times the size of Mansion House and therefore more beautiful. No one climbed the steep tall hill to the valley, preferring to go by sea around Takatu peninsula and call at Kawau if going to Omaha or points north.

Part was citrus and the other, newer types of apple. The seventh orchard was the 'pink' orchard – it had nectarines, apricots and peaches – and new varieties of peach were added – the last I recall 'Million Dollar'.

Apples I recall the names of today: Early Eve, Irish Peach, Scarlet Queen, Gravenstein, Ohinemuri, Ballarat, Permain (and Vaile Early?) Lord Nelson, Russet, Gold cluster, Rheimer, Pippin, Late Shell, Reinette du Canada, Romanite, Delicious, Northern Spy. Newer varieties: MacLennan, Sturmer, Dougherty, Shepherds Perfection, Wheatland, and as I call to mind, I realise there are many I cannot name now!

Plums I recall were: Purple Gage, Greengage, Purple King, O'gen, Diamond, Damson, Angelina Burdett, Christmas, Golden Drop, Prune, Satsuma. The Burbank hadn't arrived yet, and I recall other plums I did not seek the names of as the taste was abominable, and some never seemed to ripen no matter how red they became. There were uneatable pears too, but these could be used for pear ginger though too dry for perry.

Our orchards were open to the public since the start of bearing circa 1863 and my Father used to privately giggle when strangers stripped the huge Pound Pear which looked so appealing but was inedible.

I recall sitting on the verandah of my parents house when model T's and new half ton trucks arrived at our orchard (a quarter of a mile distant) as their fathers and Grandfathers had done on horse back or gig to gather sugar bags or fruit, and pine cones, and we would try to guess who they were. No one asked! There was no market for fruit now as most settlers had their own orchards (which made the glut) or had their own selected types they enjoyed. Those early picturesque orchards are gone!

Pears I recall were: Marie Therese, Keiffer, Jargonelle, Louise Bonne de Jersey, Vicar of Wakefield or is it Winkfield?, Matthew's Supreme, Doyenne Blanche (People came from all over Rodney for this white pear for show exhibition), Winter Nellis, Beurre Bosc B. Clergeau, B. Capaimont, B. Diel, B. Hardi, B. Brun, Christmas, William Bon Chretien, Pound Pear and all the seedlings. I did hear there were 80 types of pear and about 40 apples.

There were also many citrus: Blood, Navel, Sweet, Bitter (now Morrison's) bergamot, pomelo, Shaddock, lemon, Sweet lemon (now lemonade) lime and Mandarin. Mulberry, Elderberry, Tayberry, wild and garden strawberries, raspberry vines, English and cape gooseberries, banana and purple passionfruit, hops, grapes, banana and date palms, cherry and flowering cherry, loquat, guavas, figs (white and purple) medlar, walnut, chestnut, almond and a hedge of hazelnuts. The grapes, like the strawberries, were very small but sweet. Three persimmons. I do not know of any vegetable that was not planted – and there were many types of pumpkin and marrow and melons. The varieties of bean are not seen today, nor types of onions. Mustard cabbage was in every garden! It had nice green wide crinkly and prickly leaves. There was no silver beet! Kumaras, pumpkins, maize and guerande and white carrots were planted by the field as were Swedes, cattle pumpkins and mangolds. Also a field of tobacco! I played in this paradise in the 1920s and also knew Mansion House well, as my forebears had. Even then, although both areas had been untended for a decade or so, I could see that what the old settlers had told me of the glory of the Matthew strath was indeed true! The area was still breathtaking in spring blossom – also in autumn colouring – so different from the greenness of NZ. Itinerants and seasonal labourers (from Puhoi, etc.) cried at the glimpse of their 'birthplace' and wrapped their arms around the huge oaks or the tall bluegums.

My grandfolk died 1905 and 1909 and, when I played there in the 1920s the area had not been touched since the turn of the century. It was rampant with growth and bees, hosts of butterflies, bush birds, ground birds, and swamp birds lived as they had done for all their lives. No animal or bird scuttled or flew away! Nests were made close to the ground and one could look into them.

Then came change – and orchards and gardens gave way to cattle, dogs, cats, pigs and bull-dozers – to make pastures and crops. I am writing this in case there are remnants of old trees there from which you could graft. The land now belongs to Peter Tickle. I do not know what may be there now, though in 1980, I did see some fruit trees in the distance, some specimen trees in the alamedas, and I think it was a hazelnut I saw in the distance. I am arthritic and aged 78 so cannot check for you. The pioneer cottage was dismantled for a pig site circa 1915 but ‘Errol cottage’, the 1876 home, is still there, looking bare and plain instead of nestling cosily amid topiary, box hedges, shell specimen scrubs and shaded by melia azedarach – the glory gone.

There are many names I forget, many I didn’t know (or my Father didn’t recall), and many unnamed seedlings. On one pear tree may be three kinds of pear. As three Matthew sons and two Anderson stepsons had free range to bud and graft there were some startling finds. I smile as I read of ‘new’ discoveries. A ‘scented’ camellia at Kamo? when the adult tree grew at Matakana 1910. The ‘lemonade’ grew in our orchard in 1920. We called it ‘sweet lemon’. ‘Vaile Early’ arrived in the 1940s (and when purchased one had to sign not to give away grafts or buds for 2 years) This apple grew wild on the roadsides and gum flats of Matakana, a seedling of Pearmain apple in 1920s!

Morrison’s seedless poorman orange was growing as adult trees in the Matthew Bros orchard, being procured from a ‘bitter orange’ brought by George Grey to Kawau from Australia. Matthew Bros supplied Red Bluff and Albertland orchards (the daughter of the eldest Matthew son married an early Albertland settler). Several local residents here did also marry Albertlanders and Waipu settlers – and so flora was soon distributed.

The first orchard was motley. The main orchard was pear and apple alternately and all cordon shape. The third orchard was mostly very early harvesting pears and apples. The fourth orchard was late pears and apples and was somewhat apart from the others. (The fifth orchard was planted 1876 for use of ‘Errol Cottage’ and was part of the huge landscaped second garden. It was circled by red corral trees,

and is not counted in the total seven). So the fifth orchard was the wholly plum orchard. The sixth was a double orchard, but was planted at the same time.

There was no disease in the strath when I first knew it. Codling moth and leech were controlled from the fruit for market (in the years when fruit was sold!). I remember the diseases coming – fireblight, silver blight, brown velvet fungi on wattle, black spot, white butterflies, shield beetles, Waikato wasps, curly leaf, shot hole, leaf roller, black beetle, grass grub, nematodes, bronze beetle, red spider, snails (though there were Kauri snails which gave no bother), fusarium wilt, die back... We did have aphids and slaters and moths and other insects, but none gave trouble! In the lush valley one would think there would be mildew, but the shelter was very carefully planted, dense where needed, but with selected trees planted singly on the sides of the orchards where air could flow and circulate through the cordon trees and still give shelter.

The best view of the riot of colour was from higher up the brae on either side. Here one could look down on the square or rectangular orchards and over the tops of the towering green-blue pines, the Napoleon weeping willows, copses of retained native bush, the yellow wattles, red transplanted pohutukawas, pointed and bushy cypress and poplars, rounded laurel, oak, elm and other exotica – even the tall Norfolk pines and extra tall stringybark. Bamboo of different types were here and there and the yellow-limbed basket willow.

Unchecked on the tops of guelder, pepper tree, rowan, buddleia, lilac, larch, lantana magnolia, flowering cherry, cypress, lassiandra, weigelia, persimmon, dentzia, datura, the many creepers and climbing roses had spread, and some had died. Those limbs which survived added to the wealth of blossom of tecomanthe, pandora, plumbago, everlasting pea, clematis, jasmine, bouvardia, miranda, wisteria, Japanese honeysuckle, lawyer, and roses.

So many of the roses had French names! There were China roses and German roses, all unpruned and disease free. Projecting knolls had been planted in white daisies or blue periwinkle, or white may, and nearby hedges were banks of watsonias, red hot pokers, agapanthus, strelitzia, diosma, tecoma, escallonia, privet, banksia, olearia, hydrangea and fuschias. Elaeagnus too. Every flower plant one can bring to mind was there: heath, heather, lily of the valley, narcissi, irises, dahlias, tree dahlia, callistemon, myrtle, camellias, begonia, geranium, pelargonium, montbretia, gladioli, campanula, coreopsis, verbena, nasturtium irias and sparaxis (had multiplied and cross pollinated), forget-me-not, honesty, and scented

rosemary, lavender, beside the angelica in the over-run herb garden. All had been abandoned by 1930 for over 30 years whilst fields nearer the road were brought into production for dairying. I only mention the perennials or those annuals (like alyssum) which seed freely.

Charles, the elder schoolteacher brother was a bachelor, and although teaching for brief periods (2 years at Puhoi and at lower Matakana), had spent his 50 years in the strath beautifying it. Native flora had been retained (probably transplanted, as the nikau, ponga, hoheria, kotukutuku, etc. blended so well into the exotica, and especial note had been taken of spacing perfumes. Each Sunday he escorted churchgoers around the display gardens and proffered them a glass of cider, perry, or parsnip or grape wine (those who had not signed the Pledge). The Matthew family kept Open Home from 1855 – the original track entering their front door and passing through the cottage. There were water lilies under the willows, laurel, laburnum, hawthorn, lilac, citrus, syringa, rose, violets, freesias, camphor, verbena, lily of the valley, wattle, mint, jasmine, breath of heaven, honeysuckle, clivia, magnolia, belladonnas donnas, harebells, bluebells, cannas, flags, crocus, primroses, cowslips, statice.

Each time I lay down my pen I think of another plant which grew there... wandering Jew, foxgloves, rhododendron, hollyhocks, azalea, heliotrope, bougainvillea, phoenix palms, mignonette, wallflower, nigella, salvia, catmint, ageratum, ornamental grasses, picotee, cuckoo pint, arum, star of the Veldt, star of Bethlehem, sweet William, Michaelmas daisy, ice plants and many native ferns grew below the loops (as large as one's arm) which grew entangled in the gloom below the trees with their mats of blossoming creepers and roses high above.

One uncle was a poultry and bird fancier and turkeys, geese, ducks, guinea fowl (the peafowl had shifted a few miles to more open ground on the Takatu peninsula) strutted with the wild Australian and Californian quail, the mallards and teal, kereru, kaka, bittern, pukekos, rail, wekas, and black-necked pheasants. He also had a pigeon loft, many kinds of fowl and a white cockatoo and a canary. His flock varied every five years or so to his whim. Leghorns, Rhode Island Reds, Minorcas, Silver Spangled Hamburgs, Haudins, Wyandottes. Orpingtons, Australorps and Bantams galore. His yard was almost crying with the cacophony from my father's 180 laying ducks. The Clydesdale stables had been very large, for the teams in drays which transported the flora and fruit to the scows. There were also a couple of Shires and 5 blood horses for the 5 sons as well as the harness horses for gig or rides.

In my youth there was much preserving whether fruit and vegetables and herbs, or stringing onions, storing kumara, potato and pumpkin crops, filling the crib with maize cobs, making huge stacks of hay, drying fruit and vegetables on sheets of iron, making butter, smoking fish, curing ham and bacon, making soap and candles, curds for the ducks, curing skins for leather, shelling dried beans. Everyone had a large veggie garden and fruit trees.

I have just kept writing as I remember, and the catalyst for this outpouring? – the mention of your intention to gather old disease free flora of earlier times.

You are fortunate (or unfortunate to receive this depending on your mood of the moment) for I am writing to keep my thoughts off my sore back which is particularly hostile today. I have reached the end of my writing pad, and I won't read over this but will close the envelope otherwise it will go into the rubbish bag. Whether mine or yours is not of significance! Best of luck with your endeavour. One thinks it may be too late – but it is never too late!

Mrs. Errol Jones

Born 1914



This is Bert Davies, and his daughter from Davies Road Wellsford. Bert was on the original Kaipara Harbour Country Calendar Program with me, and here he is below his most famous old pear tree, the Seckles pear. They are the pears in the inset photo. When he was in his 90's he sent his daughter up the trees to get fruit for me to taste. This Seckles pear was in a huge old pear orchard Bert had planted in 1917, and they are the best pears, many of which we still grow in our nursery and sell each winter.



Bert Davies of Wellsford under his old Seckles pear in the 1990s when he was in his 90s!

Totara House

I'll never ever forget my first visit to Totara House, one of the original homes built by the Smith family part of the first wave of settlers during this period.

This was the original family home of Mavis Smith, whose family gifted the Matakohe Museum, and later Totara House to a trust for the public good. It is the house Mavis lived in all her life and where she was actually born and died, on the banks of the Kaipara Harbour near Matakohe, with a full size billiard table in the large living area, all the original period furniture and the original landscaped garden that she was still managing largely herself at age 98 when I first met her. When I arrived she asked me why it had taken so long to come to her! And she proceeded to tell me that I had found her collecting sheep manure from under the macrocarpas, in a wheelbarrow, for the flower borders. We had a long walk around all of the garden and orchard, and my most exciting find was the Mamie Ross peach tree, an original peach which is very unusual as peaches do not usually last that long. I recognized the name from an old Red Bluffs nursery catalogue. Other trees that she showed me were:

- Hames Red apple
- Red Astrachan apple
- Northern Spy apple
- Russet apple
- Bob Lambert apple, which she said came from an old gumdigger's shanty (Bob Lambert's) and was always ready in time to put in the church for Thanksgiving.

She had Mamie Ross and Golden Queen peaches, Burbank, Wrights Early, Tragedy Prune, Golden Drop Greengage and Christmas plums, Goldmine nectarines, Maori lemons, Wonder Lemons, Quince, Adriatic Fig, the original Albany Surprise grapes, seedling oranges, a huge range of flowers including a very old but still used by her, begonia house built into the ground, and amazing double flowering prune trees that stood on both sides of the entrance to the homestead.

She said that in the early days the vegetables they grew were mostly silverbeet, kumara, potatoes (Red Dakota), leeks, cabbages, cauliflower, pumpkins

(Triamble), rockmelon, maize (which they ate as sweet corn as well) and they had no carrots. Oats for horses and porridge.

I fell in love with the old, well-kept buildings, the old corn crib and the potato storage shed with bins for the potatoes. Nearly all of the homesteads of this time had corn cribs and potato sheds where kumara also were stored often along with onion strings, pumpkins and even bottled fruit and fish.

After 30 years of collecting old fruit trees around Northland, I could see just how huge an influence the Mathew Bros Nursery had especially in the areas I have spent the most time, i.e. around the mid north and the Kaipara Harbour, however I can also see that as the Mathew Bros nursery closed in the early 20th century, there was a whole new range of nurseries springing up all over the place and the plant material these nurseries were based on was hugely influenced by the Mathew Bros.

Red Bluffs Orchards and Nursery, was one of these second generation of nurseries and that was near Warkworth. Some of the fruit varieties that were grown in the Red Bluffs Nursery and old orchards, are still available today as fruit when you buy fruit from Kenilworth orchard just south of Warkworth. Tom Morrison is the grandson of Mr. E Morrison who owned Red Bluffs Orchards and Nursery around the turn of the 20th century. The cultivars that stood out to me as being very rare that they held were the Silver Queen peach, and the Tragedy, Giant and Sugar prunes.

Another family arriving in this era of the first wave of settlers, was the Fosters who settled in Waimauku in 1845-50. They were professional gardeners from England. This was Logan Forrest's grandmother and she was a propagator, and is reputed to have brought hydrangeas to this land around 1890. Including the Queen Anne's Lace Cap from Japan, the Blue macrophylla pudding bowl (not a Mop Top) the Ayshea (Popcorn) and the blue Lin Pot (old full round flower, a macrophylla, possibly General Vicomtesse de Vibrages) found now around nearly all the homesteads around the Kaipara, from China.

Fosters had a huge Poorman's orange at Wharepapa 1890s. From the Sheehans they had buddleia, Naked ladies, agapanthus, aloe vera, salvia blue.

Fosters also were the source of the wonderful old yellow fleshed nectarine Koanga called Pouto Gold. They moved to the Kaipara in the 1880s.

The Sheehans, another early family to the Kaipara, came from Riverhead. Sheehan was a surveyor, and he settled on what became known as Sheehans Island in the 1840s, the site of the old Ship Captain's gardens. Sheehan added *Albysia lapantha*, and the black wattle (*A. mearnsii*), to the collection of trees on this island. I have spent many hours in this old garden, full of memories and old trees with stories and specific end uses. This site should really be a national heritage site.

In the late 1860s-80s, the Sheehan brothers collected produce, (mostly peaches, and mostly the peaches we call River peaches today, named after the Otamatea River, and growing wild around the shores of the Otamatea River) from the Pooks, and took flat bottomed boats from Helensville to Waimauku, over Riverhead hill to the head of the Waitemata harbour and then into Auckland. The Kaipara had large orchards producing crops well before Auckland was settled, so fruit was traded this way. It is almost unimaginable how peaches lasted that journey and still be edible, especially the ones we know as the old River peaches. I wrote about the Pook family in the introduction to *Design Your Own Orchard*, they were a very special family with a very special story and connection to the collection work I did around the Kaipara.

Peter Yardley took me to meet one of the last sons of the Pook family at Pike Point years ago, and he told me how during the first world war when the men in the family were all overseas on active service, the women of the family rowed around the Otamatea River picking peaches to take them to Helensville to be sold in Auckland.

The old house and orchard around the McLeod homestead was inspirational for me and another stunning spot on the edge of the Kaipara (McLeod's Bay) sheltered but with wonderful views. McLeods Bay, Tauuhara Creek and Sheehans Creek are all in the same area on the Kaipara.

The ornamental and edible plant material here is where Logan Forrest grew up and was inspired to spend his life with the plants and the stories. There was an obvious large amount of plant material in that garden from China, and also South Africa, telling the story of when the settlers arrived and what trading was happening in the world at that time. Loads of hydrangeas, all of the types mentioned above, obviously they came from the Fosters having a close family connection, they had the old small but very sweet tamarillo

with pointy ends, the gumdigger figs (although now we are hearing that there were figs here well before the gumdiggers having possibly come over with the French Catholic missionaries), Lisbon lemons, Burbank plums, Poorman's Orange also from China? Asparagus Fern, Lions Tail, the original Buttercup tree with single blossoms.

The trees mentioned throughout the Early Settlers section of this Booklet as well of those that arrived earlier have adapted to Northland conditions so are now an invaluable source of plant material for those of us in the North, as well as those of us wanting to future proof our food supply by doing as Martin Crawford suggests by planting trees adapted to climate zones 2 zones warmer than our current zone is.

The heritage fruit tree varieties are becoming popular again for many reasons however those of us living in the Auckland/Northland areas need to be very careful to buy only Northland adapted trees, as the trees with the same names that have been grown from plant material coming from further south are not adapted to the warm winters of the north and do not usually fruit well at all.

Many of these old Northland adapted varieties are available today through the Koanga Institute online shop. The fruit tree catalogue goes up each year in February. Koanga has not patented these heritage cultivars because they are genetics that are in the public domain and need to remain there we believe. We recommend you buy your trees from Koanga as doing so supports our charitable work of the collecting, selecting and recording of information. It makes a big difference to us.

And so it is clear by now that this period was the most amazing period for entry into this land of an enormous range of plant material, with no restrictions on anything coming in. All the best plant material from around the world arrived here during this period.



From the left... Chris Linnell, Peter Yardley (Kaipara boys), Jonathon Toye and Bob Corker with Taiamai on his back. This photo was taken in 1986 at Pike Point where the Pook family had lived on the Kaipara harbour. That was our first visit to this incredible spot and collected figs and peaches mainly, but the tree we are looking at was an old persimmon. There are great stories about that site in *Design Your own Orchard*.



Arriving by boat to Pike point on the Kaipara, home of the Pook family and a rich story of our early settlers.



Walking the last bit along the beach to Peach Island.



Arriving with Peter Yardley by boat to Peach Island off Hargreaves bay on the Kaipara around 30 years ago. Peach Island used to be covered with peach trees and it was called Pig Island by some because this Island was well known to attract wild pigs who came and climbed the trees for the peaches!



A group of Koanga staff and supporters on a collection trip back to Pike Point on the Kaipara. It was our final trip there to find most of the old trees had been cut down and cattle were destroying the regrowth. We barricaded them up with dead branches but did not hold a lot of hope.



Shots of McLeods Bay where Logan and his ancestors lived.



Looking across McLeods bay from Logan's batch to the Franich's batch surrounded by old fruit trees and ornamentals from that area.



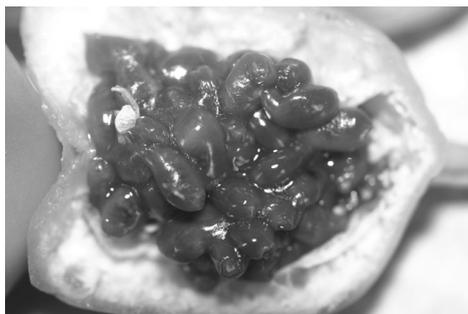
Picture from the back of Logan's wonderful batch we stayed in when we went there.



Picture from the front door of Logan's batch.



Pickling olives I picked from wild trees at Pouto.



A red fleshed sweet and delicious wild passion fruit we found.



McLeod Fig from McLeod homestead, (it is an Adriatic I think).



Yellow fleshed Pouto nectarines from Logan's place at Pouto.



Sugar Fig from the McLeod homestead orchard.

The Dalmatian Gumdiggers

The main influx of Dalmatian Gumdiggers (mostly from Croatia or Yugoslavia, Austria) into Northland was around 1870-1890, and it had a lot to do with the wars in the Middle East, the resulting famines and also the failures of the wine industry in Croatia and Yugoslavia, because of Phylloxera and fungus diseases. The gumdiggers were mostly single men, and a few with wives. These people were living in tough times, they were excellent gardeners and they fully knew the value of travelling with plant material to use as trading items and for survival. Although they are now known as the daly Gumdiggers when they first arrived they went to work in the timber mills around Northland, that were cutting down the kauri trees (Jane Manders book *The Story of a New Zealand River* is a wonderful story of life in those times on the Otamatea River right where we used to live). When the price of kauri gum soared in the 1860s and 70s they left for the gumfields being entrepreneurial kinds.

When the price of kauri gum fell around 1930 they went farming and fishing, which is when Sheehans Island was brought by the Franich family, who became fishermen on the Kaipara, and it remains in that family today.

The gumdiggers brought out pink Erica, (heather) Erica paccans, which is now naturalized around Pouto, like many other of the plants our ancestors brought out with them. We don't believe the Gumdiggers brought out olives, they were already here. Today you can still see old Dalmatian gumdigger camps with arum lilies and old figs, and on the gumfields Norfolk pines and old man pines and macrocarpa.

I'll never forget the time I was taken up onto the Ahipara gumfields to look for old fruit trees. The gumfields themselves are up on the high flats along the coast, they are super exposed and windy, and the vegetation reflects the terrible soil. There is so much wind that the scrubby plants there now grow very low and bent right over against the wind. Not a pleasant place to be spending one's working life! The old camp sites though were down in the bush in the valleys, and standing on the gumfields we could see way below remaining old Norfolk pines and macrocarpas, so they were the places we sought to find fruit trees. We were mostly too late, the gardens had not been tended for many generations since they were abandoned and few fruit trees remained, but we did find some... an old Goldmine nectarine, and Yellow

gage plums come to mind along with the ancient huge apple trees that were so large and covered with epiphytes and totally merged into the native bush that they were hard to see. The Ahipara garlic we sell now came from large areas on the gumfields that were growing wild. It is actually a kind of leek, and can be eaten both as a leek and as garlic.

The stand out memory for me from that trip was coming to the old campsites/house sites to find that the houses were totally in ruins and flattened, by the elaeagnus vines that covered the old houses, as well as the orchards. A tragic sight. I was told by somebody from a gumdigger family that when the gumdiggers came out they brought with them, not only their seeds and plant material with them but also elaeagnus. The elaeagnus was specifically to provide the compost and mulch to grow their veggies and feed the fruit trees. They knew that the litter under the elaeagnus hedges grew amazing vegetables. I even heard that that was how the gumdiggers won the prizes at the local AMP shows for the best cabbages etc. by using elaeagnus hedging litter and prunings!

Logan Forest however tells me that that plant was already in this land by the time the gumdiggers came, as it was well known as a fast and easy growing hedge plant.

In over 30 years of visiting old orchards around the North including the Ahipara Gumfields, it has become clear to me that the old Dalmatian orchards always contain really excellent fruit trees, the best material having come from the Kohukohu area, from two different families, who collected it from orchards known as old gumdiggers orchards.

Apparently the English settlers had no understanding that there were already many food plants here and did not put nearly as much effort into bringing their food with them, whereas the Gumdiggers were under no illusions that things were very tough.

The Dalmatian gumdiggers were extraordinarily hard workers, most of the big canals and drainage around Ruawai were dug by them under contract, and as well as being good workers they were natural traders.

McLeod, of McLeods Bay set up a set of trading stores and although the gumdiggers traded for necessities when needed they mostly took their own gum to Auckland. They traded with Campbell and Brown, and as the story



All of these pictures were taken on the Ahipara gumfields. The old apples stood out because they were deciduous in the winter, and the smaller tree is a goldmine nectarine.



An apple tree presumably originally growing at a gumdiggers shanty on the gumfields (or really down in the valley below the gumfields) but the area has now been taken over by native bush and the tree looked just like a huge old native except that it was deciduous. It had huge epiphytes growing on it. We collected and grew wood from this tree (which looks like a seedling 150 years old) and the fruit is fantastic.

goes a congregation of 'Dalys' would arrive out of Mahurangi by boat and sail into Auckland, then go straight to Campbell and Brown and haggle. The gumdiggers were shrewd businessmen, only picked up the best of the gum, and were well used to haggling so ended up with better prices, than others creating strife in many cases.

Obviously very entrepreneurial, Franiches a Dalmatian gumdigger family, who brought and still live on Sheehans Island, saw the potential in the fish in the Kaipara and they began by walking the streets with a wheelbarrow of fish as a trial and realised there was more money in fish than gum digging, and they started the fishing industry in Kaipara in the 1930s-40s.

By the end of 19th century, Dalmatian gumdiggers were known to have brought beans, marrows, spinach, grapes, figs, apples, pears and arum lilies, into the North along with garlic, peas, Elephant garlic, Dalmatian cabbages, Takahue garlic, Red onion, Jerusalem artichoke, Arapohue peaches, Black Dalmatian grape, White Dalmatian grape, Batley fig, Hyndmans, Kaeo fig, Black Prince plum, Giant Geniton apple, eleaguns, Golden Drop plum, Ahipara prune, Adriatic Fig, Black Fig, Maltese and Sugar figs, Lions Mane sunflower, and quince.



My mother with our two guides being shown around the Ahipara Gumfields. We are standing on the actual flat windblown area that was the gumfield where they dug.



Walking down into valley now big native bush, onto an old old house site where in front of us was a dead peach tree. Most of these old sites were marked by old Norfolk pines and old macrocarpa with elaeagnus climbing over everything.



My guides standing on the gumfields as they were in the 1990s looking down into the valleys to look to see where the old gumdiggers shantys would have been. We were looking for old fruit trees. We had to head down through huge bush , aiming for the old macrocarpas and Norfolk pines, and we did find a few live fruit trees, some of which we still have fruiting in our forest garden today. The Ahipara yellow Gae is one of them, a Goldmine nectarine is another, and a small prune plum that is probably the well known old Victoria prune.

1880s – 1890s – 1920s

This period of settlement was characterized by lots of importing via English nursery catalogues.

Mrs Rowe of Sheehan's Island is known to have imported the stand-up Christmas fruiting blackberry we now call the Pouto blackberry from an English catalogue, along with many of our favourite spring bulbs like daffodils, Snow whites, Snowflakes, Naked Ladies, and Jonquils.

From the 1890s to the 1950s there were three large orchards in Tauhara Creek area the Sheehans, the Pomare Orchard and the McLeod orchard, including all of the original fruiting trees brought in earlier, peaches, quince, apples, pears, figs and Arum lilies (brought by the Gumdiggers), as well as all the plants that were brought over from Midge Bay like the Midge Bay lilies, and the bulbs that spread from Sheehans orchard, which included the French daffodil (green daffodil) and the upright Pouto blackberries.

The 1930-40s saw the beginning of canning toheroa on West Coast beaches, started by the Dalys. And Mullet canning in Kaipara. By this time the kauri had been logged, the kauri gum had been dug, and the fish were well on their way out now too.

Northland was left behind at this point having been settled by boat there was not a strong roading infrastructure, and the railway went through and had a major negative effect on all shipping. Isolation and lack of transportation infrastructure meant that industrial farming and horticulture left Northland largely behind until recently, so as a result we are in the lucky position of still being able to see, feel and touch something of our heritage... trees, ecosystems connected to people who remember!

I suggest if you would like a glimpse of this check out Te Kopuru and Pouto and all the harbour settlements between these towns and the trees and the stories are very visible, obvious and key parts of the strength of these towns.

WWII until today

Up until the end of the second world war this enormous collection of plant material that had entered NZ during the previous 200 years or so, went through a process of naturalization in Northland, and obviously every other bioregion in this land as well. The best of it was passed around in families between friends and communities, was saved because it was good or because it adapted and survived without attention, like the figs and peaches, and quinces. We had local nurseries selling by the early 20th century what had become the best food plants from a collection that came from all around the world over the previous 100 years, for Northland. Up until this time those fruit trees that were known to do well in specific bioregions or areas of NZ were sold in the area by small local nurseries.

The Second world war changed all that and we began fast, to lose what we had previously valued as we selectively bred varieties of fruit, vegetables and grains that we could sell to the wealthy people in the Northern hemisphere. These breeding programs valued shelf life, looks and many other qualities way ahead of taste and nowhere on the lists were nutrition or disease resistance or suitability for local soils, climate or the cultural needs of the cooks!

After 60-70 years of genetic erosion and realising over a period of time that what we were replacing it with did not nourish us well, or taste as good etc., so we now are looking back to see what we can save from the past 200 years of human and natural selection of our food plants in Northland to see what we can walk into the future with knowing we have something that not only tastes good but it grows well in our environment and it has been saved and selected to nourish us and our future generations.

These trees are all part of our story, part of who we are today, and part of who our grandchildren will be. I'm so thankful for the ones who valued the food plants of their own ancestors and who kept the stories alive.

I'm also incredibly thankful to all those of you who have supported Koanga over the years to continue the work of collecting and taking care of these fruit trees and vegetables, as well as the incredible team of staff here at Koanga who so passionately take care of these Taonga of ours.

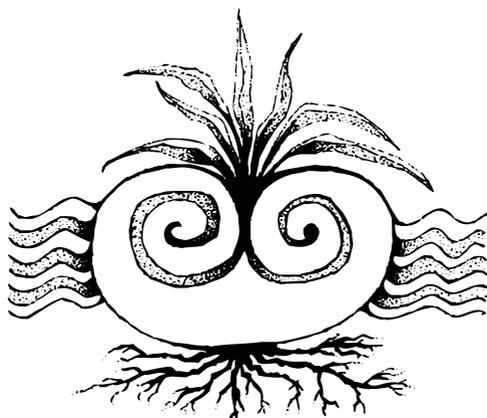
One way you can all help us maintain this collection for future generations is by buying your fruit trees from Koanga. All the profit from our nursery goes back into saving the heritage food plant collection, from which our best trees are selected to make available to you again.

Of course being a member of Koanga helps us a lot too, and we always welcome donations and any other support.

Together let's make this next 20 years the period in our story where we once again spread the best genetics we could ever have for our health and the health of our ecosystems back out again to become the genetics our food is grown from in this land.



A picture of me with Mr Cliff, who had donated his old Red Spy apple to the Koanga Collection and I had gone back to visit him when it fruited for the first time to take him an apple to bring back a few memories, along with a new tree for his family to plant again. Mr Cliff's family were amongst the early Settlers in the Paparoa Whakapirau Kaipara harbour area.



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