



REFLECTIONS on the history of Wesley College

Wesley College is the oldest surviving school established in New Zealand, having its roots in a grant of land made by Governor Fitzroy to the Wesleyan Missionary Society in October 1844.

The Society's Superintendent was the Rev. Walter Lawry and it was he who had been quick to see the need for a school capable of training young Maori to become missionaries and teachers. Lawry is regarded as the founder of Wesley College. Copies of his portrait are in the Office Meeting Room and the Chapel.

The initial site of Wesley College [then known as the Wesleyan Native Institution] fronted Grafton Road in what is now central Auckland. The first Principal was 33 year old Rev Thomas Buddle. Initially there were 10 students, but the numbers soon grew; they came from as far afield as the Hokianga and Kawhia and were young men rather than boys – some were even married. All were selected because of the promise they showed as leaders.

For practical reasons it was necessary that the school should, as much as possible, live off the land, and the move to a new property at Three Kings – a farm of 80 hectares – was a move to a far more suitable site. There, for the next 75 years and despite various setbacks, the Three Kings Wesleyan Native Institution provided a sound Christian education for young Maori and an increasing number of needy European children. At times the school was co-educational.

In 1876 the school at Three Kings adopted the name Wesley College. The first Wesley College had been established in Upper Queen Street, Auckland Central, to provide education for the sons and daughters of the Wesleyan missionaries working in New Zealand and the Pacific Islands. In 1868 this Wesley College closed and the land and buildings were donated to the Methodist Church with the stipulation that they be used for "a Wesleyan seminary, or failing that for the promotion of (a College in New Zealand) in connection with the Wesleyan Methodist Church." The Trustees of this property contributed to the cost of upgrading facilities at Three Kings in 1876 and for a time European students for the ministry received their training there. The Queen Street buildings reopened as a school with Methodist links in 1895. At the request of Conference it became known as Prince Albert College.

As the College moved into the twentieth century the realisation came that Three Kings was no longer an ideal site as the city had expanded and industries were being developed nearby. No longer was farming considered suitable so close to the heart of an ever-expanding city.

At this time with the approval of the Methodist Conference, a Bill was promoted in the House of Representatives which, when enacted in 1911, provided for the setting-up of the present Wesley Training College Trust Board. A subsequent amendment enabled the Trust Board to purchase land at Paerata.

But for the intervention of the First World War the new school would have been in existence long before the opening date of 29 August 1922.

The Rev J H Simmonds, who had been appointed in 1895, having re-established the College at Paerata, retired the following year, and handed over to a 31 year old Australian, Mr Roy Clark. At this time the roll and curriculum were broadened, but the Church's responsibility to Maori and Pacific Island students was recognised in the special provisions for their welfare.

World War Two proved a major setback for the College. Defence authorities took over the buildings and the students were dispersed. The efforts of Mr Clark and his predecessors to build a great school of distinctive character and individuality suddenly seemed to have been in vain. Almost before the site was handed back it was again taken over to house an American unit of some 600 men and 120 nurses.

When the school eventually reopened in February 1944 Mr (later Rev) E M Marshall was appointed Principal – a position he retained until his retirement in 1964. During those two decades the roll rose from 27 to over 200 students.

In 1976 Wesley College became the first Private School to Integrate with the State School System under the terms of the Private Schools Conditional Integration Act 1975. As a State Integrated School, Wesley College has the advantage that comes with being a government funded school with a Special Character. The school is governed by a Board of Trustees, comprised of elected Parent Representatives, a Staff Representative, Pupil Representative, the Principal and representatives of the Wesley College Trust Board. The property, including the Boarding Hostels, remain under the control of the Trust Board.

Although the W H Smith Memorial Chapel (1929) remains the most significant and beautiful building at Paerata, there has been a rapid expansion programme initiated since the College was Integrated in the State Education system in 1976. The erection of Caughey Hall (1979), the Hames Music Centre (1984), Te Paea Hall (1984) [accommodation for senior girls – reintroducing girls to the College], the McDougall Library (1988), the new Staffroom (1989), the Recreation Centre (opened to mark the 150th of the founding of Wesley College in 1994), the Watson Common Room (1999), the Whare Wananga (2000), the new Dining Room (2000), two permanent Dormitory Blocks known as Unit A and Unit B (2003), and a relocatable 4-unit complex (known as Unit C opened in 2004), the conversion of Lower Harding into a Computer Suite have contributed significantly to campus Life and to the property's pleasing prospect. A major renovation of the teaching blocks is expected to commence in the future.

As the College enters its 160th year it does so with considerable confidence and not a little pride. Wesley College, the Methodist Church of New Zealand – Te Hahi Weteriana o Aotearoa's only school, stands as a practical expression of that Church's concern for education: particularly for Maori and Pacific students, orphans and those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

WESLEY COLLEGE PRINCIPALS

(at Paerata)

Rev. J H Simmonds	1895 – 1923	
R C Clark, MA (Melb), Dip Ed	1924 – 1944	
Rev E M Marshall, BA, Dip Ed	1944 – 1964	
C A Neate, MA, Dip Tchg	1965 – 1967	
E Te R. Tauroa, B AgricSc, Dip Ed, Dip Tchg	1968 – 1973	(1)
J B McDougall, E.D., B Agric Sc, Dip Tchg	1974 – 1988	
G V Cowley, MSc(Hons), Dip Tchg, JP	1989 – 2002	
I F Faulkner, JP, MA(Hons), Dip Tchg	2003 -	(2)

(1) Wesley College Pupil 1941

(2) Wesley College Pupil 1963 – 1967

SPECIAL CHARACTER

[The following are extracts from the Wesley College Integration Agreement signed 30 November 1976 between the Board of the Wesley Training College being the Proprietor of Wesley College, Paerata, ... and her Majesty the Queen acting by and through the Minister of Education.]

“The parties hereto accept and agree that Wesley College was originally established to provide education with a special character and that at the date hereof it provides education with a special character described in this clause.

Wesley College is a multi-racial school which while non-sectarian has a direct affiliation with the Methodist Church of New Zealand and with the strength and support of this church affiliation provides education based on the beliefs and philosophies of the Christian faith. This includes religious observances.”

“In addition to religious education the College also supplies industrial (which term includes agricultural) training and an emphasis on instruction in the English language.”

“Wesley College has a special obligation to provide education for students of Maori descent, students of Pacific Islands descent, and orphans or otherwise disadvantaged students. It aims to provide a school at which students of all races can receive their education and learn to live and work together in harmony.”

“Wesley College caters primarily for students boarding at the Proprietor’s hostel with which it has a close association. It is acknowledged by the parties hereto that the Proprietor’s hostel at present provides for residential accommodation with a special character that is an essential component of the special character of the school.”