Te Kani Pere, 2010

WIREMU PERE lived from 1837 to 1915, through some of the most turbulent chapters in New Zealand history. As a chief of the East Coast, warring with the Paihia, and Te Whakataki a Mahia, Wi Pere stood resolute against the tidal wave of change that threatened the Maori way of life. He exerted the might of colonisation, and entered Parliament in 1884 seeking to protect his Eastern Maori constituents against Pakeha encroachments, land sales, and dismembering of the Treaty of Waitangi.

At the same time, Wi Pere was proactive in seeking the potential business opportunities afforded through the coming of Pakeha settlers. This position could not but leave him compromised. In his life he was loved and hated by both Maori and Pakeha, regarded as a hero or a villain depending on whether or not one benefited from his work. His historical legacy has been ambivalent, and many of the details of his personal circumstances have been unclear.

This book sets out to clarify Wi Pere’s life and contribution to the Maori people. Not a simple, linear biography, it approaches Wi the man and leader from a number of angles and in various contexts. Part 1 considers Wi’s events life and those who had an influence on him, while describing the environment that faced Maori in his lifetime. Part 2 looks at his whakapapa, which can be traced back to ancient sungama lines in the migration of the Ngati and Tapirua canons from Hawaiki. Part 3 is an appendix covering the Wi Pere Trust, one of 95’s legacies that prosper and grow today.

Compiled over many years by a dedicated group of his descendants, Wi Pere: The Life and Times of a Maori Leader, 1837-1915 is a fascinating story of this colourful migrant. It will appeal particularly to students of Maori and political history, the people of the East Coast, and those who seek to understand the conflicting forces that shaped New Zealand’s post-colonial identity.
proved impossible to make any impression on the people, even in
districts where Te Kotahitanga was being held.

Carroll’s attitude to the bills introduced by Wi and Heke fol-
lowed the lines of a speech he gave at the Waitangi meeting
of April 1892 where he claimed that the act admitting Maori
representation had, in more practical form, fulfilled the spirit
of the Constitution Act. The legislature had done all it could to
ameliorate the conditions of the Maori race and had moved in the
direction of:

consummating the behest contained in the Treaty of
Waitangi, to make the Natives British subjects in every
particular way. ¹⁰

The majority of Maori themselves felt that the provision of
the act of 1900 establishing the New Zealand Maori Council
represented the maximum concessions that they could expect from
the government. Ngati Porou, one of the few tribes that had never
had any serious quarrel with the government, called the meeting
at Waikomatatini on 21 March 1902, which brought to a close the
ten-year-old Kotahitanga movement. At that meeting Wi pointed
out to the assembled tribes that the purpose of Te Kotahitanga had
been to make the voice of the Maori people heard. The perception
was that Maori grievances were being heard and the government
had heeded the cry of the people and the movement should be
brought to its end:

It has not done away with wrong doing but its progeny
has emerged in the world, the act of 1900 ... There
is no work for the Kotahitanga Movement today. Let
each Council show its grievances to the House and
show its wishes. ¹¹

It is significant to note that the tribes of the west and east coasts
of the North Island were in the majority at the meeting to bring Te
Kotahitanga to an end. These people had suffered the least loss of