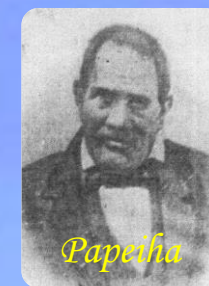




Papehia: Bringer of the Faith [1796-1867]

Go- therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age." - Matthew 28:19-20



Papehia

To God be the Glory and Praise. This plaque was sponsored by the CICC Bicentennial Celebrations Unit and unveiled on 25 July 2014 in recognition of the extraordinary efforts of a key figure in Cook Islands History, Papehia (aka Papeiha) TEATO of Borabora, from the Mai Tribe (a Chiefly family of Raro-Mata'i in Borabora) in successfully introducing Christianity to Rarotonga on 25 July 1823 against incredible odds including fierce opposition from Rarotongans, ongoing tribal warfare, rampant social crime and idol worship, thereby ushering in a new dawn for the people. Papehia was one of two Society Island (Tahiti) converts trained as missionaries in Raiatea by the famed Rev. John Williams and posted to Aitutaki on 26 October 1821. Rev. Williams considered Papehia and a colleague Vahapata as two of his 'best' students. After successfully converting the island of Aitutaki to Christianity within a period of two years, Papehia moved on to Rarotonga on the schooner "Te Matamua" with Williams and two Tahitian Teachers named Vahineino and Fanauara, arriving at Rarotonga on Friday 25 July 1823. Before arriving in Rarotonga they made an unsuccessful attempt at converting Mangaia but achieved total success in Atiu, Mitiaro and Mauke. Rongomatane Ariki of Atiu gave the directions on how to reach Rarotonga. The party's arrival at Rarotonga was greeted by warriors Po and Pou from the Ruling Makea Ariki Tribe of Te-Au-o-Tonga who took the Christians under their personal protection. The party of Tahitian Teachers and their wives stayed their first night at Taputapuātea in Avarua while Papehia rested with Makea Tinirau Ariki at Arai-te-Tonga. The natives were not very courteous and tried to violate the Teachers wives. It was Tapaeru-ariki (the grand-daughter of Makea Pini Ariki) who fought off the natives to protect the visitors. The next morning, the Teachers hastily re-boarded the ship with their wives all bruised and shaken and informed John Williams of their terrifying ordeal. A decision was then made to abort the mission. This was when Papehia volunteered with the consent of Williams to stay back with Makea Ariki and evangelize the island on his own. He came back ashore with only the pareu and girt he wore, a small store of literature (printed in Tahitian) wrapped in a pocket handkerchief and the promise of protection from Makea Ariki, the expectation of forthcoming reinforcements, and of course a very strong Christian faith.

Over time, Papehia proved to be a great evangelist which earned him the phenomenal success in converting Rarotonga to Christianity is well known. Williams wrote of Papehia in 1830, "...one (Papehia and the Tahitian teachers) these superior advantages." With home grounds. He approached chiefs within their own districts, arguing

"Whether the savages spare me or kill me, I will land among them. Jehovah is my Shepherd. I am in his hand."

Papehia to John Williams, 26 July 1823.

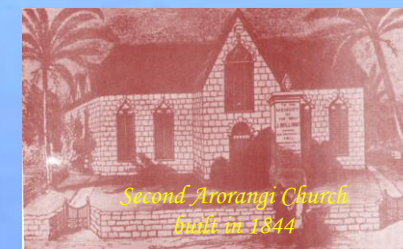
undisputed distinction of "Bringer of the Faith" to Rarotonga. His known. He achieved more in Rarotonga in 2 years than the English colour, almost one language, and a sense of oneness of habit gives them great zeal, Papehia set about tackling both Ariki and Ta'unga on their the cause of the new faith looking for an influential convert who would in turn bring all his followers into the church. He followed priests even to their marae discussing with them aspects of the old religion and insisting on the superiority of the new one. That he survived at all is remarkable. Papehia also had the added advantage of being a good friend of Tapaeru-ariki who served as his helper and protector. Local political rivalries also helped Papehia's cause. The doctrine that the weak would eventually triumph over the strong and the meek inherit the earth or at least get a greater share of its bounty had a certain appeal to those chiefs who had been dispossessed by their rivals. His initial efforts at evangelizing the people of Te-Au-o-Tonga in his early days on Rarotonga didn't produce any results. His first successful conversion occurred when Tinomana Enuarurutini Ariki the Paramount Chief of Puaikura became the first Paramount Chief on Rarotonga to accept Christianity and brought with him several hundred followers. Tinomana eventually moved his tribe from their refuge around the foothills of Maungaroa down to what is now modern day Arorangi, a village model designed by the Rev. Aaron Buzacott to resettle people down to the coast. Soon after Tinomana's conversion, Papehia also managed to convert Pa Ariki the Paramount Chief of Takitumu leaving Makea Pori Ariki as the very last to accept the new religion. Despite many challenges, Papehia and his colleagues' pioneering achievements in the first five years included the abolishment of idol worship; building of the first LMS Church at Rautara (the current site of the CICC Mainstore); teaching the natives to read and write; establishment of a legal code to regulate people's behaviour; introduction of a new modest dress code; and the establishment of the LMS Stations at Ngatangia and Arorangi.

In 1825, Papehia secured his acceptance into traditional society by marrying Te Vaerua o te Rangi, the eldest daughter of Tinomana Enuarurutini Ariki and wife, Te-Pori-a-Pa, of Takitumu, daughter of Pātaputapuātea and Teuira a Makea Pini. By his marriage into the Tinomana Tribe, Papehia was granted a 'Rangatira' title. Together Papehia and Te Vaerua had eight children: Te-Upoko-o-Nga-Ariki (f), Tekao (m), Taromi (f), Rangitai (f), Isaia (m), Tepori (f), Matoi (f) and Ani (f). The Papehia family lines still exist to this day (except Rangitai who died without issue). Papehia is survived in Tahiti by the descendents of his only sister Nātua. Following in his father's footsteps Isaia (the fifth child of Papehia and Te Vaerua) became an Orometua in the LMS Church



First Arorangi Church built in 1828.

and also served at the Arorangi Church. Part of the LMS strategy for ensuring the rapid growth of Christianity in Rarotonga was to establish Village Stations. Rev Pitman was placed in charge of the Ngatangia Station, Buzacott remained in Avarua while Papehia was placed at the Arorangi Station (which opened in November 1828) where he remained until his death on 15 May 1867, aged 71. In 1972, the descendents of Papehia erected a monument in his honour in the Arutanga CICC church yard, Aitutaki. Another monument was erected in the Arorangi CICC churchyard in 1974. In true pioneering spirit, Papehia Teato revelled in an unprecedented position of authority and influence. His mana convinced the Rarotongans that material as well as spiritual blessings would accrue to them through their acceptance of Christianity. And so it came to pass that war, tyranny and dread, exchanged for peace, liberty and joy, bringing to an end the Age of Darkness. Hallelujah, Amen.



Second Arorangi Church built in 1844