

PINEAMINE TAIAPA



Pineamine Taiapa was born at Tikitiki on the East Coast on 6 June 1901. His mother, Maraea Te Iritawa, and his father, Tamati Taiapa, were of Te Whanau-a-Hinerupe, a hapu of Ngati Porou. His mother was also connected to Te Whanau-a-Te Aotaihi, Te Whanau-a-Umuariki and others. Pine was the fifth of fourteen children, and was adopted at birth by a bachelor uncle, who wanted a child to whom he could pass on his traditional knowledge. Pine was to say later that he knew whakapapa including 10,000 names. He returned to his parents only after his uncle's death. He was also well educated in Pakeha knowledge, attending Te Aute College from 1917, where he excelled at boxing and rugby. He was fluent in English and Maori.

After leaving school Pine Taiapa farmed family land at Tikitiki, worked as a surveyor's chainman, and continued to play rugby. He represented Poverty Bay in 1921 and the East Coast in 1922 and 1923; in these years he was a forward in the Maori All Black team which toured Australia. Despite his education, Pine was unsure what he wanted to do until the carving of the Maori war memorial church at Tikitiki commenced about 1924. An old carver, Hone Ngatoto, came to work on the church, and boarded with the Taiapa family. Pine was deputed to fetch and carry for the old man, and to make his tea. Blocked by etiquette from asking directly for tuition, Pine watched the work for six months until an opportunity came to handle a chisel. A row ensued, but eventually Pine was permitted to work alongside the old man.

Apirana Ngata had noted the difficulty in obtaining carvers to work on the Tikitiki church, and in 1926 succeeded in establishing a Board of Maori Arts. A School of Maori Arts was formally established at Rotorua in 1927, and Pine Taiapa was one of its first students. His teacher, Rotohiko Haupapa, was using only the paring chisel, and was not keen to pass the secrets of Te Arawa carving skills to students from Ngati Porou. On inspection of the work at Rotorua Ngata noted the absence of the flowing lines achieved by the carvers of Porourangi,

a meeting house built at Waiomatatini in 1888. Pine too, who had swiftly mastered all Rotohiko would teach, felt something was missing, and many times dreamed that he was climbing a mountain, searching among ancient carving styles for something lost. After a while he realised he was looking for techniques associated with the adze. In 1929 Ngata instructed Pine to find an expert in the use of the adze, telling him to visit the many hapu of the East Coast, seek out surviving elders with the requisite knowledge, and get them to teach him the dying art. He had no success until he was advised to go to Eramiha Kapua of Te Arawa, then living at Te Teko. With Ngata's agreement, Pine visited Eramiha on 30 January 1930, and persuaded him to go to Rotorua to teach the students the art of adzing.

Adzing techniques released Pine Taiapa's skills. Swift flowing lines instead of painstakingly chiselled detail meant that he could carve not only better but faster, although he still used the chisel for his detailed work; his carving was renowned for its fine finish. At times he carved from 5 a.m. until midnight, with only brief rests. Between 1927 and 1940 he worked on 64 houses, including Te Hono ki Rarotonga (also named Te Au ki Tonga) at Tokomaru Bay; the carvings were done mainly in Rotorua from 1928 until 1933 and it was opened in 1934. Pine's younger brother, Hone, also worked on the house. Another house, Te Whitireia at Whangara, completed in 1939, was regarded by Pine himself as the best he had done. It held special significance for him as a spiritual centre of his own Ngati Porou people.

From 1934 Pine worked intermittently on the centennial house at Waitangi. At first this was under Harold Hamilton, but after his death Pine himself supervised the work, and most of the carvings were done under his direction. He also worked on other houses. Ngata aimed at the revival of carving all over the country, and as soon as there was money available for a house he sent Pine and his colleagues to make a start. When the locals' money ran out his team moved on, returning when the community had raised money for the next stage.

Kapua had taught his pupils not to bother with carving tapu, fearing that in their ignorance of the exact wording and deeper meanings of rituals, they might err more dangerously than if they ignored the whole matter. Pine regarded himself and his pupils as free from this burden: he was even prepared to teach women to carve. Yet each time he finished a house, he placed one of the chisels behind a tukutuku, unwilling to separate the mauri (life force) of the tool from that of the carvings it had created. He was also conscious that to many people his work was tapu, and he was ready to use their awe to protect his carvings if the need arose. In the 1930s he carved a door lintel in the likeness of the female ancestor Parengaope for the meeting house Raukawa at Otaki. When King Koroki was invited to open the house, the Tainui elders warned that they would not allow him to enter it beneath this ancestor, in case his tapu was infringed by her exposed sexual organs. Pine refused to take the carving down, and suggested to the owners of the house that they take that risk themselves. Ngata attempted to defuse the situation and a compromise was eventually reached.

Pine Taiapa used every opportunity to teach local communities the skills of their ancestors. To make the centennial house at Waitangi representative, the design included 14 pairs of poupou (posts) carved in styles taken from every tribal area. In Raukawa and other houses he designed the tukutuku work, made by a local team under his direction, to be similarly representative. He taught his trainees the names of the patterns and their meanings, each portraying some aspect of community and tribal life. Because of these inner meanings, important to the Maori world view, he refused to allow decorative innovation.

His own attitude to change was ambivalent. Working with a party from Te Whakatohea on the kowhaiwhai (rafters) of the meeting house of the Taihoa marae at Wairoa involved restoration work, and the mounting of the tekoteko (figurehead), Te Otane, on the apex of the house. The tekoteko had been lying in brambles behind a local church for decades. Pine rescued it and gave it to a young worker to sand off; he discovered that the tekoteko's penis had been removed by Christian missionaries. Outraged by the desecration, he suggested that Pine carve and attach a new one. Pine refused, saying that the crime should never be covered up.

Pine used traditionally carved houses and carvings as his models, yet his work shows a degree of transition from the stylisation of traditional carving towards more naturalistic figures. He was not above a joke at the expense of both tradition and his hosts. One of his masterpieces is reckoned to be a carving of the early ancestor, Paikea, and his whale (on which he travelled to New Zealand) at Whangara; Pine gave the whale a schnapper tail.



In 1940 Pine Taiapa enlisted in the 28th New Zealand (Maori) Battalion. He fought in the North African campaign as a second lieutenant and, from April 1942, as a lieutenant. In 1941 he led a haka party at Cairo to entertain General Freyberg. He was wounded on 15 December 1941. He was promoted to captain in October 1942 and returned to New Zealand in 1943.

Pine Taiapa married three times. His first wife, Mary Perston of Ngati Porou, died in 1941. There were no surviving children of the marriage. His second wife, Mereana Raukete Ngapo, daughter of Te Urupa Ngapo of Ngati Porou and Marutuahu of Hauraki and his wife, Paki Te Rau-o-te-ngutu of Te Whakatohea, died in 1949. They, too, had no surviving children. On 1 December 1951 at Tuparua, Pine Taiapa married Mereaira Te Ruawai Grace, daughter of Te Pua and Keita Te Moana Grace. They had three children and adopted another. Pine had at least one more natural son and informally adopted many more children.

From 1943 Taiapa became involved in rehabilitating returned servicemen. In 1944 he was one of five Maori rehabilitation officers appointed; his area was the East Coast, centred at Gisborne. His district was large and Pine had little enthusiasm for paperwork, yet he arranged housing loans and other benefits for the returned men from his own company with such enthusiasm that the department attempted to curb his activity. By April 1946 he had been released to return to his carving.

Perhaps because of his increasing family responsibilities, about 1951 Pine Taiapa quit full-time carving and returned to sheepfarming at Tikitiki. There had never been any money in carving; while at the Rotorua school he had averaged only £2 per week. He also had a small

income from leased land. Nevertheless, he continued to carve, working on another 39 houses between 1946 and 1971.

In many ways this was his period of greatest influence. His standing on the marae was very high; he possessed the knack of including all his audience in his whaikorero (oratory) whether they understood Maori or not, switching fluently from Maori to English. He was a kindly, charming man, patient with his students, who, in a gesture of affection, anglicised his name to 'Pine' (as in pine cone). He sat and listened to the old people on the marae, and incorporated their stories in the designs for their houses.

Pine gave lectures, was involved in adult education and taught carving and tukutuku work at Omarumutu, Tikitiki, Hicks Bay, Tauranga and at Victoria University of Wellington. He would use the people he had trained in one area to start the work in the next, so that the circle of expertise was always widening. He was influential in farming circles too: at his suggestion a Waiapu branch of the Young Farmers' Club was founded in September 1954, with all of its members Maori.

Pine Taiapa also ventured into writing. He published 'How the kumara came to New Zealand' in *Te Ao Hou* in 1958; the following year he won first prize in the magazine's literary competition with a traditional story, 'Haere ma te tuaraki korua e manaaki'. In 1960 and 1961 he published important articles on 'The art of adzing', committing his and Eramiha Kapua's teachings to paper. He wrote booklets explaining the plan and identities of the carvings of various houses he had designed and worked on, some of which were published. He produced a maramataka (calendar) and kept meticulous whakapapa books. Copies of these have been preserved in the Alexander Turnbull Library.

Pine Taiapa remained active, carving and lecturing throughout the 1960s. In 1966 he launched the first Maori arts course to be included in the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council of New Zealand's annual school of music at Ardmore. He died at Tikitiki on 9 February 1972 aged 70, survived by his wife and children. His tangihanga, held at the Rahui marae, was attended by more than 3,000 people. He was buried at Tikitiki on 11 February 1972.

Monuments to Pine Taiapa's prowess as a master carver feature in over a hundred marae throughout the country, and in many institutions, including Te Aute College and Tikitiki Maori District High School. Sometimes regarded as the greatest carver this country has produced, Pine Taiapa was certainly one of the two most prolific; the other was his younger brother, Hone. Only Apirana Ngata had a greater impact on Maori cultural resurgence in the twentieth century. Pine Taiapa was also a great teacher and motivator, and thanks to his work many aspects of Maori art survived and took on new life.

Reference: <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/4t3/taiapa-pineamine>