



HERITAGE NEW ZEALAND  
POUHERE TAONGA

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## MEDIA RELEASE

### Baron found himself 'landless gentry' in New Zealand

Charles de Thierry was one of life's optimists.

A slightly delusional Anglo-French 'baron', his first brush with New Zealand took place in the rarefied halls of learning at Cambridge University in 1820.

It was here that he met the two Northland rangatira, Hongi Hika and Waikato, who had travelled to England to assist Professor Samuel Lee in compiling a Maori-English dictionary. The two leaders were also feted by society during their trip, and even met King George IV.

"Charles de Thierry signed a deal with Hongi Hika to purchase 40,000 acres of land in the Hokianga. The price of land probably including a large number of muskets, which Hongi later used in his raids around the North Island," says the Northland Manager of Heritage New Zealand, Bill Edwards.

"De Thierry later claimed that Hongi had also appointed him 'Sovereign Chief' – a title that proved to be as worthless as the land transaction itself."

Full of expectation, de Thierry arrived in Tahiti en route to New Zealand in 1835 and announced his intention of taking up his fiefdom. When he arrived in New Zealand, however, he found a very different reality.

"Charles de Thierry discovered that 'his' land had already been occupied – and that local rangatira Patuone and Nene strongly denied that Hongi had the right to sell land in what was most definitely their territory in the first place," says Bill.

"The two leaders felt sorry for de Thierry, however, and gifted his wife 800 acres. It still wasn't enough for de Thierry to put into place his grand plan for colonisation however."

Visitors to de Thierry's home at Rangiahua on the way to the Hokianga, described a poor but distinguished, well-mannered eccentric living with his wife and daughter in a one-roomed clay hut, with an earth floor, packing cases for furniture and hammocks for bedding.

De Thierry's big-noting in Tahiti had flow-on consequences in New Zealand however.

"James Busby, the British Resident at Waitangi, heard about de Thierry's grand designs, and was alarmed. His response was to use the situation as an opportunity to call a hui of Northland Maori tribal leaders at Waitangi with the intention of thwarting de Thierry's plans," says Bill.

“The result was He Whakaputanga o te Rangatiratanga o Nu Tirene – the Declaration of Independence – which asserted New Zealand’s independence as a sovereign nation, and which was signed by the Rangatira present.”

The Declaration of Independence has strong significance for Maori, and the place of He Whakaputanga is still widely discussed and debated today.

These and other stories are told in an exciting new app for Android and Apple smartphones and tablets entitled *Path to Nationhood*. Produced by Heritage New Zealand, the suite of six Northland app-based tours are available free to download, and are a must-have for visitors to Northland, as well as locals.

Once downloaded the tours can be enjoyed anywhere – irrespective of whether there is wi-fi or a cellular connection – making it the perfect virtual tour guide.

“When Pakeha first arrived in Aotearoa they found a dynamic Maori society that was very much a going concern – and loaded with opportunity,” says Bill.

“The contact and interactions between Maori, who were economic players in their own right, and a diverse group of Pakeha are part of the journey that led us on the path to nationhood and the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi. The tours take people to the places where these interactions occurred and introduce them to some of the characters that made this period of our history so dynamic and extraordinary.”

Feedback from people who have already enjoyed some of the app tours has been overwhelmingly positive according to Bill.

“The tours make this incredible period of our history come alive, and tell these stories in an engaging and accessible way. Many of the stories centre around some of our fantastic Heritage Destinations in Northland, so people can actually visit places where many of these people lived, and events took place.

“It’s fair to say that the app tours give people an opportunity to see history through new eyes,” he says.

For a free download of the *Path to Nationhood* suite of Northland tours visit [heritage.org.nz/apps](http://heritage.org.nz/apps) or search for Heritage Trails through your online app store.