

**More about He Whakaputanga, significance of the slates and literacy at Kerikeri Mission Station.
Courtesy of Liz Bigwood, New Zealand Heritage Pouhere Taonga.**

Perhaps the most successful undertaking at the Kerikeri Mission Station were the schools established in the early to mid-1820s. Held in the Chapel there were separate lessons for girls and boys, and to encourage attendance by Māori living in the kāinga a cooked meal was provided by the missionary women. During periods when food was scarce school attendance naturally fell away, but later on, as reading and writing caught hold, attendance became more regular, and the schools were very popular.

Lessons were taught in te reo Māori and the Kerikeri missionary teacher's method, 'Mutual Instruction', where senior or more accomplished pupils taught juniors, proved extremely successful, probably because it mirrored whanau based tikanga, where older children cared for and instructed their younger siblings.

One of the most accomplished pupils at Kerikeri, a relative of Hongi Hika called Eruera Pare Hongi, was ten years of age when George Clarke sent a letter of Eruera's, written in Māori, to the leaders of the Church Missionary Society in London in 1825.

In his letter Eruera asks for writing paper and an invitation to visit England. He also wanted to know the names of the 'chiefs' of Europe, and how Europeans decided who were 'good' people and who were 'bad' people. George Clarke described his top scholars as '...quite masters of reading and writing.' (This letter is still in existence, and is held in the Alexander Turnbull Library collection in Wellington)

Eruera Hongi went on to become the most prominent Māori scribe of the 1830s. He wrote the Māori text for the letter sent by thirteen Ngāpuhi Rangatira to King William IV in 1831 from Kororipo, where, amongst other things, they asked the King to send laws to govern his British subjects in New Zealand.

Eruera was also the scribe for the Māori text of He Whakaputanga, the 1835 Declaration of Independence, but passed away the following year in 1836.

His cousin, Rongo Hongi, the daughter of Hongi Hika, was also ten in 1825 and living with the Kemp family at Kerikeri. Here she learnt the 'domestic arts' under Charlotte Kemp – sewing, embroidery, European manners etc – and attended the girl's school taught by Martha Clarke.

Standing with dignity in both the Māori and European worlds was the ideal Hongi Hika had for his daughter – living with the Kemps provided Rongo with some of the abilities needed to navigate these very different worlds.

Rongo has also left a legacy of her reading and writing abilities – a slate she signed was found under the pantry floorboards of Kemp House in the year 2000. On it Rongo has written, most likely with a nail so it could not be rubbed off, *Na Rongo Hongi 16*, declaring the slate was hers and that she was 16 years of age. The pantry floorboards under which it was found were laid in 1831.

This slate has been recognised by UNESCO for its importance in helping tell the stories of early Māori literacy, by being accepted onto the Aotearoa New Zealand Memory of the World Register in 2018, and can still be seen in Kemp House, where it is on display.

Eruera's letter and Rongo's slate are tangible evidence of how the written word, or literacy, was embraced by Māori. However, it can be argued that the success came from the missionaries mirroring of tikanga – providing food is manaakitanga, the teaching method of Mutual Instruction

just so happens to mirror whanau practice, and learning to speak te Reo, one of the most challenging tasks faced by the missionaries proved to be one of the most successful in engaging with Te Ao Māori.