

Summary of Beaglehole Report

Wanganui was founded by the New Zealand Company in 1840-41 and was initially referred to as the settlement at Wanganui. The name Wanganui began appearing in written form in the late 1830s in reference to the river and the people living along its banks. The name was not carried by any Maori pa or kainga.

The first written reference to Wanganui that has been found is in a book published in 1837 by the New Zealand Association, forerunner of the New Zealand Company. The book was called *The British colonization of New Zealand* and the author was Edward Gibbon Wakefield.

The name Wanganui has been sighted in many diaries and journals of early visitors to the area. These include William Wakefield's diary (October and November 1839) and the journals of missionaries Rev. Henry Williams (1839), Rev. James Buller and Rev. Octavius Hadfield (1840) and Rev. Richard Taylor (from 1843).

The Wanganui spelling also appeared on at least two early maps in 1841 and 1843.

A distinctive feature of local Maori dialect is the pronunciation of the *wh* sound. Among local iwi the sound is barely aspirated – sounding more like *wa* (as in want) than the strongly aspirated *Wha* (pronounced as *f* in other tribal dialects). The spelling was a result of how early European visitors and settlers heard the name pronounced.

The spelling was also influenced by the development of written Maori through the work of missionary Thomas Kendall and linguist Professor Samuel Lee and the publication of various Maori-to-English dictionaries by other missionaries.

The Whanganui spelling was not in any sighted early diary or journal. The term might have been used in the records of other early visitors, but the consistent use of the 'Wanganui' spelling by missionaries and the New Zealand Company suggests this was unlikely. It did feature on two early maps, produced in London in 1841 and 1843.

The name of Wanganui was changed in 1842 to Petre, which was not popular. While Petre remained the official name until 1854, the Wanganui name continued to be widely used. It was used in March 1845 throughout Commissioner William Spain's report on the New Zealand Company's claim to the district of Wanganui.

From the mid-1840s the Whanganui spelling began to emerge in the written record – which coincided with local Maori becoming more acquainted with the written version of their language. The 1844 *A dictionary of the New Zealand language* by the Rev. William Williams listed the word 'wanga' but not 'whanga'.

The first sighted example of a letter written in Maori by a local Maori with the Whanganui term was a letter from Hori Kingi Te Anaua dated November 1850.

From 1850 there was an increase in the use of the Whanganui spelling, influenced by the discarding of 'wanga' in favour of 'whanga' in the second edition of *A dictionary of the New Zealand language* in 1852.

In 1852 the name Whanganui was used in a Catholic mission register and in the grant leading to the founding of Wanganui Collegiate School – where the trust deed showed the location of land under the 'District of Whanganui'. The school's governing board is the Whanganui College Board of Trustees although the school has been called Wanganui Collegiate School since around 1867. For well over 100 years the school has accommodated both spellings in a sensible and comfortable manner.

The town's name was officially changed from Petre to Wanganui in January 1854 by way of a Wellington Provincial Council Act.

Both names appeared in 1864 on a map produced by civil commissioner James Mackay – the map indicates the location of 'friendly and unfriendly tribes' and has the town as Wanganui and the river as Whanganui.

Evidence indicates that from the late 1860s the two spellings were used in a variety of papers and publications. References to Wanganui are far more prevalent than references to Whanganui in newspapers published in English. Whanganui references mainly relate to Maori, the river and the wider region rather than to the town. In Maori-language newspapers there are more references to Whanganui than there are to Wanganui.

In August 1902, the town's Mayor, Alexander Hatrick, suggested that to mark the coronation of King Edward VII the town's name should be 'Whanganui, in accordance with the original native name and meaning'. The motion was not supported by council.

Ten years later, Rev. Herbert Williams delivered a paper to the Wanganui Philosophical Society, remarking 'in this particular part of the North Island you have the example of the Natives in dropping an "h": it is no more correct to write and say "*Wanganui*" for "*Whanganui*" than it would be to write and say "Ampstead Eath" and plead the example there of the natives.'

Between 1900 and 1920 the references to Whanganui in general newspapers continued to be in the main used in relation to 'Maori matters'. Maori newspapers continued to show a strong preference for the Whanganui spelling.

The issue of changing the town's name arose again in 1938 at local government level, prompted it seems by a recently formed committee called the 'Whanganui Historical Committee' – set up to 'collate and prepare records to be edited and published for the Centenary, and to be responsible for historical details in connection with local pageantry'.

The issue was responded to in the local press and discussed by the Chamber of Commerce – with only one member reported to have been in favour of changing the name.

The matter was also discussed by the Whangarei Borough Council, and a letter was sent from that council to the Wanganui City Council saying ‘it is felt that the addition of the letter ‘h’ to Wanganui will increase the confusion already existing, particularly as time and custom have made the present spelling generally accepted.’

The letter and one from the Historical Committee were referred to the incoming Wanganui City Council. There is no record of the matter coming before the new council but at some stage it must have rejected the Historical Committee’s proposal. This is confirmed in Chapple and Veitch’s centennial history, *Wanganui*, which notes that ‘In 1938 the proposal to change the name of the city to Whanganui was again unsuccessfully advanced.’

In 1945 another group, the local branch of the New Zealand Founders Society, adopted the name ‘Whanganui’. In 2000, however, the branch decided to remove the ‘h’ from its name and become the Wanganui Branch.

By 1950 the ‘Wanganui’ spelling had been used for some 113 years and Wanganui had been the official name of the town for nigh on 100 years.