

# OVER THE YEARS

## A HISTORY OF THE RURAL COMMUNITY HALLS IN THE ROTORUA DISTRICT



# FOREWORD

Nau mai, Haere mai,

There are nine rural community halls in the Rotorua District, at Broadlands, Kaharoa, Mamaku, Ngakuru, Ngongotaha, Okareka, Reporoa, Rerewhakaaitu, and Waikite. Volunteers have driven the development and maintenance of these vital community facilities, which have been the focus for community functions and gatherings for many years. In 2001, Rotorua District Council awarded certificates of appreciation to many of these volunteers for their tireless efforts to sustain the upkeep of their local halls.

This booklet was commissioned by the District Council to record the history of Rotorua's rural halls, for both archival and community interest. Information was compiled in the latter months of 2002 by Marlana Maru, a Year 2 Bachelor of Applied Social Science student from the Waiariki Institute of Technology. RDC Social Research Officer Paul Killerby undertook additional editing and formatting.

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We would welcome any further background information on the halls listed in this booklet, which will be recorded and utilised in any further update of the publication.

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RDC Community Services Officer

Cover photos, clockwise from top:

1. Mamaku War Memorial Hall, date unknown.
2. Students at Ngakuru Hall wait to perform at their 2002 end of year concert.
3. Opening of new Broadlands Hall, November 1985.

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# INTRODUCTION



Mamaku Centennial Dance, 1994

Rural community halls are a focal point for social events, sports, and other activities. From generation to generation, they have provided a place for the community to gather, celebrate, commiserate, watch movies, socialise, dance, play games, compete, and debate issues.



Reporoa Memorial Hall, 2002

Local volunteers largely drove the planning and construction of Rotorua's nine rural halls, with assistance from community fundraising and donations. Today, the management and maintenance of the halls still relies on the energy of volunteers, with funding and assistance from the District Council and other sources.



Waikite Valley Settlers Hall, 2002

Each of Rotorua's rural community halls has been central to the development of its respective community. This booklet records some of this rich history, collected from written and oral records. Although community involvement in the halls has waned over the years, they remain a vital part of their communities' social fabric. Contact details are included at the back of this booklet for each of the rural community halls administered by Rotorua District Council.

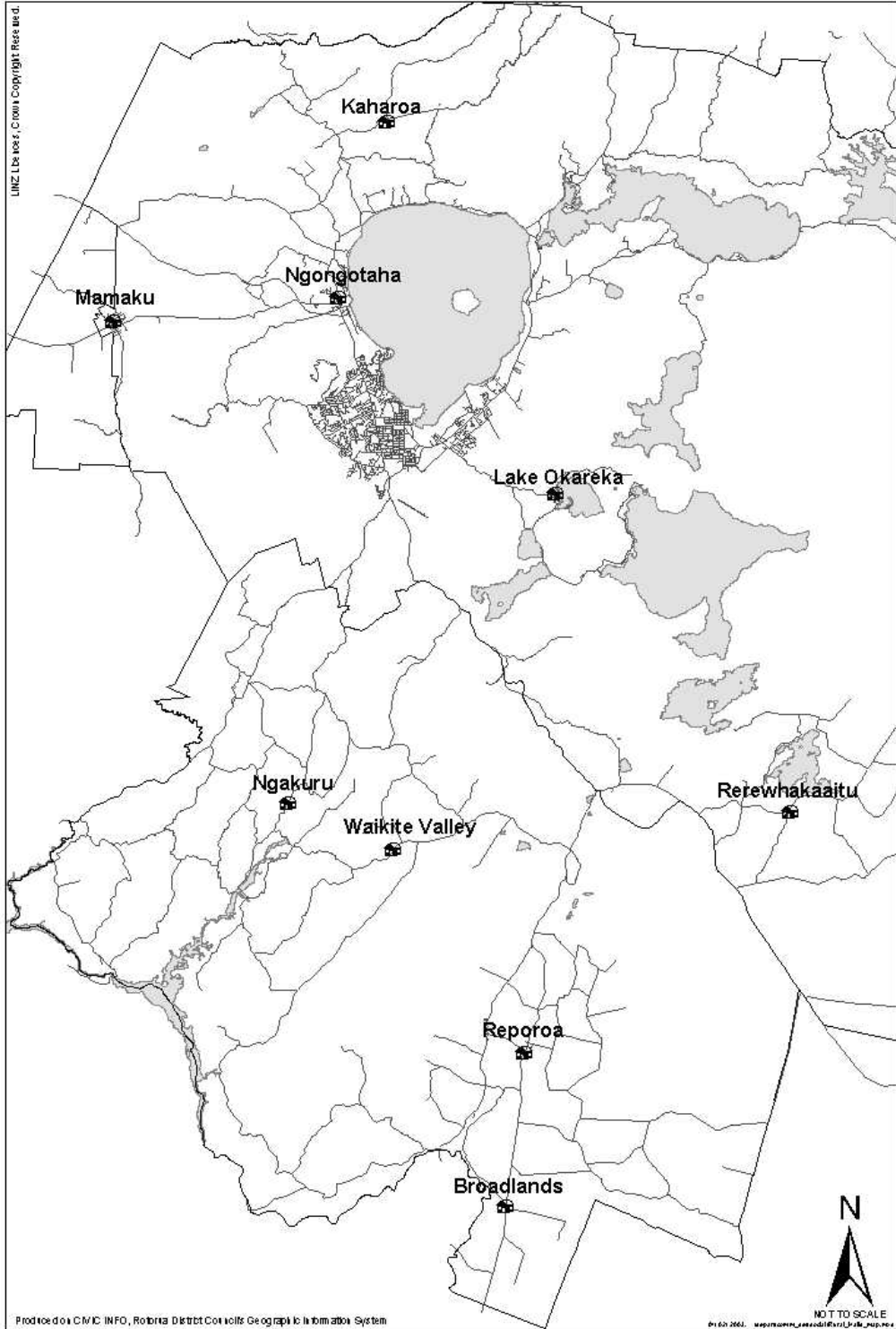


Lake Okareka Hall, 2003



An interview with Rerewhakaaitu residents Triss Hill, Marie Jepsen, Norman Reichardt and Rei Reichardt, December 2002

# LOCATION MAP



# KAHAROA HALL

In April 1923, a group of settlers formed the Kaharoa Public Hall Society Incorporated for the purpose of developing a community hall. Many local residents volunteered to assist with construction, and the Kaharoa Hall was subsequently opened in June 1925. The Society owned and managed the hall, and endeavoured to keep it operational at all times. However, exception was made during the Depression era of the 1930s, when resources were rationed and money was scarce. The Society was effectively inactive from 1934 to 1943, although it still managed to raise funds to pay rates.



Newly rebuilt Kaharoa Hall, 1971

When the Hall Society was re-established in the mid-1940s, the level of support from the community was remarkable. The Society undertook fundraising events and activities, and many Kaharoa residents contributed donations of household items, materials and money for the purpose of repairing and renovating the hall. The hall reopened on 18 May 1946, with an evening celebration dance to follow.

In 1967 the Kaharoa Hall met with misfortune when it was accidentally burnt down. However, with support from the Kaharoa community and a grant from Golden Kiwi lotteries, the facility was rebuilt and again reopened in 1971. Members of the local community volunteered many hours of labour to assist with building the new hall. According to the chairman of the Hall Society at the time, Mr C. Miles, development of the new hall was enabled "... solely by the community effort shown by residents during its construction" (*Rotorua Daily Post*, 1971).

Although the Kaharoa Public Hall Society and members of the Kaharoa community strove to retain ownership over the hall, upkeep costs eventually became overwhelming. In 1986 the District Council accepted a request from the Society to take over the hall's ownership. Day-to-day management remains with local volunteers.





Kaharoa Hall, December 2002

Kaharoa Hall is greatly appreciated by those who have used it, and holds a distinctive place in the local community. Regular users of the Kaharoa Hall include sporting groups, community groups, and students and families from the adjacent Kaharoa School, which regularly uses the hall for its annual concert and other events. The Kaharoa Hall Committee organises various activities at the facility, including dances, games evenings, and Christmas parties. The hall is also used by the community for functions such as weddings, birthdays, dances, and indoor sports, as well as for public meetings.

# BROADLANDS HALL

In August 1939 Mr Earl Vaile donated a section of land to the Broadlands Public Hall Society. However, the site remained vacant for five more years due to the outbreak of World War II. In 1944 the Rotorua Returned Services Association (RSA) contacted the Hall Society and offered to sell them a building located in Rotoma. Upon approval by the Society, the new hall was transported in sections to Broadlands.



Former Broadlands Hall, date unknown

Broadlands Hall was officially opened on 23 October 1944 by the chairman of the Hall Society, Mr R. J. H. Richards, along with the manager of the Rotorua Branch of the Bank of New Zealand, Mr Cunningham. The opening was followed by a celebration dance and fundraising. Throughout the evening the hall committee sold tickets for lucky number turkeys and towels, as well as soft drinks and confetti. The evening ended at 1.30am with the singing of the National Anthem.

The Broadlands School and District 50<sup>th</sup> Jubilee Committee (1985) records the following impressions of the opening celebration by committee secretary Mrs Jessie Richards, as transcribed from the hall's minutes book. "From far and near the people came to view our building, and viewing, some expressed their great surprise of the up to dateness and compactness of same. The inside of the Hall had been beautifully decorated with ferns, flowers and streamers, the musicians stand being a bower of greenery. Those who did the decorations were to be congratulated on their exquisite taste... The floor was exceptionally good and great praise is due to those who accomplished this miracle... The whole programme went with a good swing, everybody joined in and had the time of their lives."

Construction of new hall, 1985





Broadlands Hall, December 2002

Broadlands Hall has received many alterations and improvements over the years, with much of the cost covered by Hall Society fundraising. In 1945 a ladies cloakroom was added and the kitchen was lined. In 1953 the hall was painted and a water tank and system installed, as well as a zip heater. The roof was also straightened and strengthened, and eight electric lights and two power points were installed. In 1954 a concrete septic tank was built to improve the toilet facilities. Other improvements have included the installation of a new dance floor, new seats, and painting of both the interior and exterior of the hall.

A replacement hall was built in the mid-1980s with funding from the Ohaaki Public Amenities Fund. The new Broadlands Hall was opened on 22 November 1985. As reported in the Taupo Times (1985), "... district residents filled their new hall for Friday's opening which included items by Broadlands School pupils, afternoon tea, a look around the hall and a chance to sign the visitors book." The opening was followed the next day by a commemorative ball. Like its predecessor, the present-day Broadlands Hall is well used by the local community.

# NGAKURU HALL

In 1943 a public meeting was held to discuss the building of a hall for the Ngakuru area. At that meeting a working committee was formed to plan the construction and to begin fundraising. Purchasing materials during wartime proved to be an enormous task, but construction finally began on 8 January 1945. Volunteers from the Ngakuru community and the newly formed Hall Society carried out all the planning and work. "Farmers came along and helped, as time permitted from their own work, bringing along any other available labour who could wield a hammer or use a saw or paint brush" (Ngakuru Jubilee Committee, 1983, p 58).



Opening of Ngakuru Hall, 1945

Mr Sim, MP, officially opened Ngakuru Hall on 18 August 1945. This was just a few days after VJ Day, and so proved to be an exciting time for everyone. Ngakuru Hall Committee chairman Mr Oberer announced that "... a week in which a tremendous war had ended was also an appropriate time to celebrate district progress.... In a small way the building of the hall was an example of what could be done by co-operation and goodwill – and the war had been fought to make co-operation and goodwill possible everywhere" (*Rotorua Daily Post*, 1945). A ball was held in the evening to celebrate the opening, along with a supper prepared by local women.

For many years after its opening the Hall Society hosted a successful annual ball, with all proceeds going toward the operational costs of the hall. There were many other fundraising events run by the Hall Society and other community members in support of the hall. Community effort, participation and support have assisted in keeping the hall operational.

Ngakuru Hall, December 2002





Students from Ngakuru School wait to perform at their 2002 end of year concert.

Various improvements have been made to the hall since its construction, including a supper room that was built in 1954. In 1965 the front area outside the hall was sealed. In the 1970s the front entrance was renovated and a new floor put in. Local volunteers assisted with the many different improvements. The Ngakuru Jubilee Committee (1983, p 58) recalls amusingly that "... a story arose about the willing helpers... there was one in particular who was putting a lot of effort into painting the new supper room – only to find that he had added paint stripper instead of paint thinners into the paint!"

The Ngakuru Hall has had many uses over the years, hosting activities such as gymnastics and other indoor sports, social functions, educational and recreational activities. The hall has been particularly valuable for Ngakuru School, which has been able to use it for various activities including its annual end of year concert, and regular activities such as indoor sport and recreation. The hall is utilised by many Ngakuru residents and is an integral part of the local community.

# NGONGOTAHA COMMUNITY HALL

The village of Ngongotaha has had three different public halls, each of which has served the community in its own unique way. The first hall doubled as the local movie theatre, but was sold to Lion Breweries for the purpose of building a tavern.

The Ngongotaha Centennial Hall was subsequently built in May 1942, with funding from a Government subsidy as well as fundraising by the hall committee and the Ngongotaha community. The new hall was a popular venue for weddings, birthdays, small social gatherings, and dances. In addition, many community organisations and groups held meetings at the hall, including the Women's Division of Federated Farmers, and the Ngongotaha branch of the Plunket Society.

In 1968 it was decided that the hall was no longer suitable to service Ngongotaha's growing population. Following a rigorous debate, the building was sold to local accountant Mr Noel Farmer. Since then the old hall building has been used for a variety of purposes, and is now a health clinic.

The building of a new hall was enabled by the assistance of members of the community and various organisations. The Ngongotaha Community Hall was opened on 12 December 1970, and has subsequently been well used by a wide range of people from Ngongotaha and surrounding communities. Regular users include local service organisations, sport and recreation clubs, and the internationally renowned Ngati Rangiwewehi Maori cultural group.



Ngongotaha Hall, December 2002

# MAMAKU WAR MEMORIAL HALL



Invitation to Mamaku War Memorial Hall opening, 1953

In 1947 the Mamaku Ratepayers Association wrote to the Rotorua County Council requesting information on subsidies for a war memorial. At a subsequent public meeting, the community decided the memorial would take the form of a new town hall. Mamaku's existing town hall was built in 1909, and was not suitable for many of the activities that local community groups were later engaged in. In 1949 plans for the new hall were submitted to the County Council. Local resident Cecil Hemmings gifted land for the hall, and numerous volunteers contributed time and labour to fundraising and construction. Mr G. A. Walsh, MP, officially opened the Mamaku War Memorial Hall on 12 December 1953.

As long-time resident Jim Nicholson recalls, "... the first occasion held in the hall after it was opened was the wedding of Shirley Ferguson and Jim West. There were lots of meetings at the hall, and a dance at least every fortnight. There were some beautiful orchestras that played here, five piece orchestras. The good ones would come back." Over the years, the hall has been the focal point of many community events and activities in Mamaku. Residents Jim Nicholson and Arthur Roe remember, "... there were some wonderful, wonderful evenings here, wonderful nights. This hall here was very well used.... There'd be about 100 to 125 people who came to the socials."

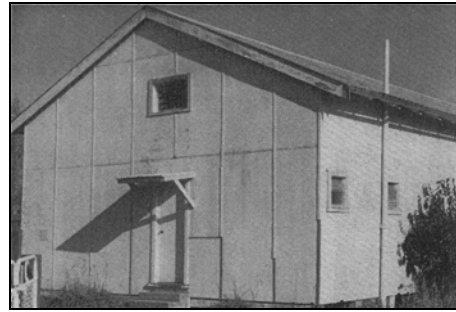
Mamaku War Memorial Hall, 2002



Voluntary assistance from the Mamaku community has been an integral part of establishing the hall and keeping it operational. In the 1970s the hall committee hired local builders to construct an extension to the facility, and many people from the community pitched in and helped. The committee raised money for the extension by holding cabarets, and also received a grant from the Ministry of Recreation and Sport. The Mamaku War Memorial Hall has hosted many events, occasions and gatherings over the years, and continues to be used for community activities and events.

# REPOROA MEMORIAL HALL

In the early 1950s the Reporoa community outgrew its existing public hall. Long-time resident Noeleen Martelli recalls that "... in 1951 there was a huge influx of Second World War men who came to the district and then the old hall proved to be far too small and the conveniences were updated. So they rallied round and decided they wanted a better facility, and so they approached the Council, raised the loan for about £9000." The Reporoa Memorial Hall was subsequently built in 1957, dedicated to those who fought and died in the first and second World Wars. Mr N. B. Hunt, chairman of the Rotorua County Council, officially opened the hall on 4 May 1957. A ball was held to mark the occasion.



Former Reporoa Hall, date unknown

Many activities, celebrations and social gatherings have been held in the Reporoa Memorial Hall. Resident Verna Martelli remembers that in days gone by, "... movies were shown once every two weeks, and dances were held once a month.... They were really happy times." According to Noeleen Martelli, "... everyone went to great pains to get pungas to decorate the hall.... Everyone brought supper, you'd never dream of hiring a caterer... everybody came, children and all, wrapped in rugs... they were really fun times."

Functions that have been held at the hall include ANZAC memorials, weddings, anniversaries, sport, recreation, and club meetings. Noeleen Martelli notes that "... the hall was always the hub of everything we did... there was always something to look forward to... it was marked on your calendar. People would come from far and wide to listen to the Reporoa Revellers".

The hall has been used in recent years by a wide range of people and organisations from the Reporoa community and surrounding area. A variety of alterations have been made, including electric heaters and wheelchair access. The Reporoa Memorial Hall continues to be much appreciated by those who use it.

Reporoa Memorial Hall, 2002





# WAIKITE VALLEY SETTLERS HALL



Waikite Hall, December 2002

For many years, public meetings and social gatherings at Waikite Valley were hosted in "Wallace's implement shed". In the 1950s, due to limited space and a growing population in the area, this venue could no longer adequately service the local community. A Hall Society was formed to raise money and construct a new district hall. It was agreed that the site for the hall would be adjacent to the Waikite Valley School, as this was a suitable central location. Sports days and galas were two events that were held to raise funds for the hall, with the first in 1953. Various other fundraising events such as card evenings and housie nights were also organised, to collect enough money for the hall to be opened debt-free. Local residents volunteered time and labour to build the hall, while the County Council supplied a carpenter and engineer to manage its construction.

MR N. B. Hunt, chairman of the Rotorua County Council, officially opened the Waikite Valley Settlers Hall in 1957. The opening was celebrated with a grand dance, attended by many people from in and around Waikite Valley. Mr Don Sandilands, a long-serving member of the hall committee, recalls that "... there was a big turnout, the hall was really packed out... in those days functions were very well attended."

Waikite Valley School students practice for their 2002 end of year concert



The hall has been utilised by a range of people since it was opened, and has proven to be a valuable asset to the community. It is of particular importance to Waikite School, which makes use of the hall on a regular basis for student assemblies, indoor sports, and the students' end of year concert. Other members of the community use the hall for activities such as table tennis, indoor bowls, and badminton. People have also gathered at the hall to celebrate weddings, anniversaries, birthdays and other events.

# REREWHAKAAITU SETTLERS HALL

In the 1950s, settlers in the Rerewhakaaitu area formed a public hall committee. Under the supervision of a Rotorua County Council building inspector, the committee built a hall that would prove to be the focal point of the Rerewhakaaitu community. The settlers received a Government subsidy of £500 and then raised £4000 themselves through donations of hay, boner cows and calves, and other initiatives. A mob of sheep was purchased, raised by local farmers, and re-sold. Two seasons' crop of lambs and wool were also sold, with all proceeds going to the hall. Other fundraising events included housie nights and card evenings. In this way, the hall was debt-free for its opening day. Much of the success in terms of construction and fundraising was thanks to the sharing of information from the Waikite Valley Hall Committee, which had recently opened its own hall.



Inside Rerewhakaaitu Hall, 2002

Triss Hill, a committee member who helped build the hall, recalls an amusing incident that happened during construction: "It was a cold day, bitterly cold. Ernie Hopkins was above me, nailing on the top sheets of iron, and I was below. I couldn't resist, his boots were there and ... I nailed his boots to the ground. He tried to move one foot then the other foot, then I heard 'my bloody feet are frozen!'... So anyway he had his revenge 'cause when we opened the hall they had me in the corner there, and nailed me to the floor."

Mr N. B. Hunt, chairman of the Rotorua County Council, officially opened the hall in 1958. The occasion was followed by a commemorative dance, making good use of the venue's kitchenette, dance floor and stage. As the *Rotorua Daily Post* reported at the time: "... pouring with rain outside, but glowing with the shine of good spirits inside, the opening dance at the Rerewhakaaitu Hall was an occasion most fitting to so fine a building."

Rerewhakaaitu Hall kitchen, 2002





Rerehakaaitu Hall, December 2002

Shortly after its construction was complete, ownership of the Rerehakaaitu Settlers Hall was vested in the Rotorua County Council. Many alterations to the hall have been undertaken over the years, through the commitment and hard work of the hall committee and supporting members of the Rerehakaaitu community. Major alterations have included the building of a supper room and addition of the play-centre room (1975), and construction of the Andrew Fox meeting room with the assistance of a bequest from the estate of a past resident (1986). The local community is very proud of the current facility.

Private functions held at the Rerehakaaitu Settlers Hall have included weddings, birthdays and other events. Various indoor sports have also been played in the hall, including indoor bowls, badminton, darts, and table tennis. In addition, community organisations and groups have used the hall as a venue for meetings, social gatherings, movie nights and balls. Users of the hall have included the Rainbow Entertainers Club, Federated Farmers, Women's Division of Federated Farmers, Plunket Society, Rerehakaaitu School, and Garden Circle. According to long-standing resident Rei Reichardt, also a member of the hall committee, "... those who make use of the hall respect it and look after it."

# LAKE OKAREKA HALL

In 1955 members of the Lake Okareka community identified the need for a public hall, as local groups and organisations needed a suitable venue. A Hall Society was subsequently formed, along with a hall committee. Members of the committee focused on raising funds for the establishment of the hall, as well as providing entertainment for the young people of Lake Okareka, while the Hall Society sought other forms of funding as well as a suitable site. Fundraising activities included stalls, raffles and dances. Residents assisted the hall committee by supporting fundraising, donating money, and helping with the construction of the hall. The Rotorua County Council also provided assistance, by supplying building equipment and a foreman carpenter. Construction of the hall commenced in November 1958, and the facility was opened in 1959. The hall was then vested in the Rotorua County Council.



Lake Okareka Hall, January 2003

The first function held in the hall was an Easter stall and dance in April 1959. This was a successful event, with all proceeds going toward the cost of construction. Many other functions and activities have been held since then, including Christmas and New Year celebrations, dances, and meetings. There have also been numerous indoor sports played in the hall.

The reserve on which the Lake Okareka Hall is located was vested in the Rotorua District Council in 1980. The hall, and the land to the rear of it, are now used largely by the Lake Okareka Pre-School Education Group. Other users of the hall include community groups, sporting groups, and both local and non-local people for private functions. The hall has an important place in the community and is enjoyed and respected by those who use it.



The area behind Lake Okareka Hall is well used by the local Pre-School Group

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## FURTHER INFORMATION

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