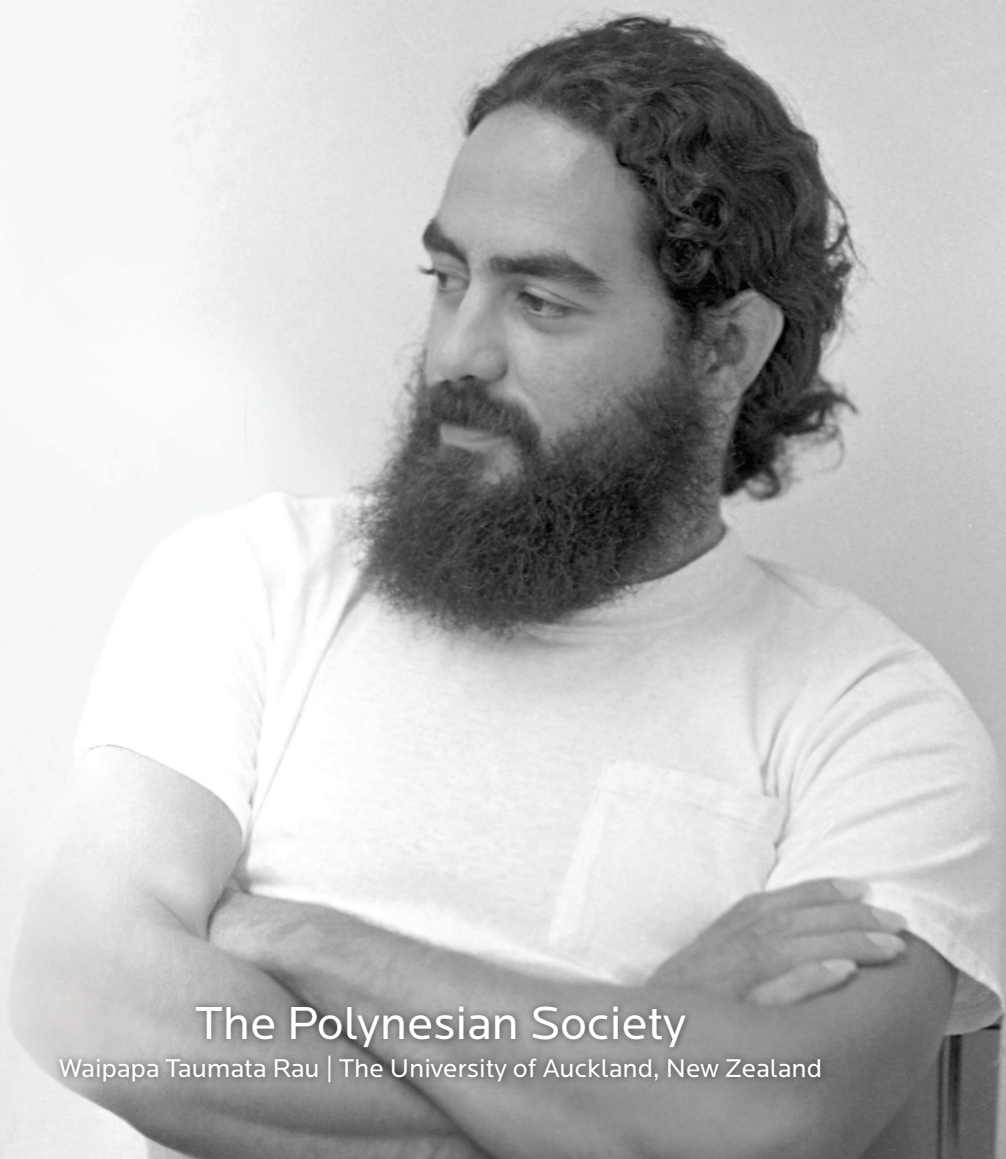


waka kuaka

The Journal of the Polynesian Society

VOLUME 134 No. 3, SEPTEMBER 2025



The Polynesian Society

Waipapa Taumata Rau | The University of Auckland, New Zealand

HE POROPOROAKI:
A FAREWELL TO M.P.K. SORRENSON, 1932–2025



Professor Sorrenson (left) receiving the 2015 Elsdon Best Memorial Medal from then-Polynesian Society president Richard Benton. Prof. Sorrenson's accompanying address, "The Lore of the Judges", was published in *The Journal of the Polynesian Society* (2015).

Kua hinga te tōtara i Te Waonui-a-Tāne. A tōtara in the great forest of Tāne has fallen: Emeritus Professor of History Maurice Peter Keith Sorrenson (Ngāti Pukenga, Pākehā).

I am humbled by the opportunity to remember, honour and farewell Prof. Sorrenson—especially in the pages of *Waka Kuaka: The Journal of the Polynesian Society*. He first published with *The Journal of the Polynesian Society (JPS)* in 1956. His essay "Land Purchase Methods", based on his MA dissertation, offered new research and careful scholarly insight into the relationship between nineteenth-century methods of acquiring Māori land and Māori population decline (Sorrenson 1956). He would continue to publish with *JPS* throughout his career and wrote the Society's history, *Manifest Duty*, marking 100 years in 1992 (Sorrenson 1992). The Society recognised Prof. Sorrenson's outstanding scholarship in 2015, awarding him the prestigious Elsdon Best Memorial Medal.

Meanwhile, his first *JPS* essay maintained its currency. The New Zealand Māori Council reprinted it in the Council journal *Te Maori* (Sorrenson 1971a). It featured again in Keith's 2014 collection of essays *Ko te Whenua te Utu | Land Is the Price* (Sorrenson 2014). The long life of "Land Purchase

Methods” exemplifies one of the striking features of so many of Keith’s works: they are essential. They are relevant, revealing and long-lasting. His exemplary publication record, spanning more than 60 years, speaks for itself.

Keith was known to have a great love of rugby, as well as his own rugby credentials as former captain of the First XV (and dux) at Tauranga College. But he also had a bottom line, as seen in his persistent opposition to New Zealand’s sporting contacts with South Africa (Ward 1997: 7). Keith was a long-serving member of Citizens’ Association for Racial Equality (CARE), established in 1964. By then he had extended his research interests in colonial and race relations history to East Africa, after graduating DPhil from Oxford University (1962) followed by a research fellowship at Makerere University, Uganda (1963–1964). President of CARE from 1971 to 1973, Keith identified institutional racism as a root cause in the race relations problems New Zealand faced, pointing to justice and education in particular (Day 2023: 42). He published topical works on New Zealand relations with South Africa, joined the protests against the 1981 Springbok tour and—ever the historian—co-authored publications that marked 10 years and then 25 years of CARE (see, e.g., Sorrenson 1971b, 1976a; Sorrenson and Newnham 1989; Sorrenson *et al.* 1974). Keith’s work with CARE is but one illustration of his impressive record of service beyond the bounds of the university.

Within the walls of the university, indeed within his home department, Keith’s record of service is equally impressive. He was associate editor of the *New Zealand Journal of History* from its first issue in April 1967 to 1986, after which he was co-editor with Judith Binney until 1995. The April 1997 edition of the journal, titled “Koha”, presents a collection of essays in his honour (Binney and Montgomerie 1997). That the authors were, in 1997, at different career stages and on different career trajectories underscores Keith’s sustained academic influence through undergraduate teaching and learning, postgraduate supervisions and Waitangi Tribunal research.

My first meeting with Prof. Sorrenson was in the 1980s. I was an undergraduate student in his course Race in the Antipodes (New Zealand, Australia and South Africa), the only 300-level offering in history at the time that appealed to my appetite for Māori historical studies. I had already encountered some of his work, including his *JPS* essays. “Land Purchase Methods” springs easily to mind, as does his “Polynesian Corpuscles and Pacific Anthropology” (Sorrenson 1982), an essay based on the J.C. Beaglehole Memorial Lecture he delivered in 1981, the first time the lecture was given at the biennial conference of the New Zealand Historical Association. The lecture and essay foreshadowed another of his great works, *Na To Hoa Aroha|From Your Dear Friend*, the three-volume edited collection of correspondence between Apirana Ngata and Te Rangihiroa

Buck (Sorrenson 1986–1988). Acquiring a full first-edition set topped my wish list of books for several years until I finally tracked down an elusive volume one.

I had also studied with Keith's school textbooks as a high school student. I specifically remember *Separate and Unequal* (Sorrenson 1976b) and *Integration or Identity?* (Sorrenson 1977), two books about cultural interaction, in South Africa and New Zealand respectively. I did not know, either at school or at university, that I would develop my own fascination with policies of integration. By the time I entered his seminar room, Prof. Sorrenson was a member of the Waitangi Tribunal, having been appointed in 1986 after the Tribunal's jurisdiction was extended to consider claims that dated to the 1840 signing of Te Tiriti (The Treaty of Waitangi). I met Keith again after I graduated, when I took a position as a staff researcher at the Tribunal. I was assigned to the Taranaki (Wai 143) inquiry; Keith was the Tribunal's historian member (Waitangi Tribunal 1996). The Taranaki inquiry was one of 14 to which Keith was appointed during his 24 years of service to the Tribunal (Waitangi Tribunal 2012).

When I returned to university to start my PhD, I hoped Keith would be my supervisor. But it was not to be. When he took early retirement in 1995, I might have been disappointed had he not continued to show an interest not only in my research but, in subsequent years, the progression of my career. It was during this period that I met a small but important group of Māori students who had similarly found their way to a 300-level course that Keith taught: The Treaty and the Tribunal. Several of his essays during this period consider the Tribunal's role in "reinterpreting" NZ history, the resolution of Māori grievances and giving effect to the Treaty (Sorrenson 1987, 1990, 1995). Meanwhile, this particular cohort of students remember him as being especially encouraging as they enjoyed what became Keith's last years of undergraduate teaching before he retired. The student group gave themselves the name Ngā Mōrehu o Hītori (The Survivors of History), a tongue-in-cheek suggestion that to reach stage III in history as a Māori student was to survive it. They identify Keith and Deborah Montgomerie as instrumental in energising them to create a distinctly Māori space for whanaungatanga (relationship building) and manaakitanga (support) within history (Connell *et al.* 1999).

A few of us who belong to a certain vintage of Māori alumni of the University of Auckland stayed in touch with Keith after he left. We fondly recall morning tea at his and his wife Judith's beautiful home in Parnell. Some years later, I would walk with him in the sunshine along Tāmaki Drive for lunch at a local café near the home he and Judith retired to. We remember Keith as kind, always encouraging and engaging, ready with advice and

gentle provocations on our research. His humility and genuine interest in the subjects that mattered to us meant we could relax in his company, without losing sight of the inspiration he sparked in us. I am thankful that I got to know him well enough to call him Keith. And yet there is a part of me that insists on relating to him as Prof. Sorrenson—respected and beloved academic kaumātua (elder) with an untiring instinct to support younger scholars.

Nō reira, moe mai rā e te pāpā, haere. Haere ki o mātua tūpuna, rātou kua whetūrangitia. Haere, haere, okioki atu rā.

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