

Unstable Ground: Migrant Producers, Selling, and Discrimination in Auckland 1890-1920s

Beginning a narrative part way through makes for a confusing story. Yet, recollections of Auckland's horticultural histories often do exactly that. Prioritising the quaint Victorian garden and divorcing horticultural practice from other intersecting histories of war, of survival, and of immigration, has made for an incomplete retelling. This series of articles seeks to depart from that tradition, exploring the deep interconnection between the social histories of Asian and Eastern European migrants in Aotearoa, and their contributions to the horticultural sector. Tāmaki Makaurau was central to this history as so many of these migrants settled on its fertile land. To help readers understand the following articles, this first one will provide a condensed historical background. It will also explain the scope of this project and comment on the key theme of continuity and change.



Garrisoned Farm near Drury, circa 1863

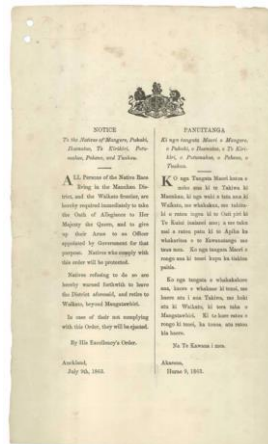
With fertile valleys and volcanic soils, Auckland, encompassing the Kaipara through its central isthmus and Waikato plains, is ideally placed for horticulture. Its original name, ‘Tāmaki Makaurau,’ captures the wealth and vibrancy of the area. Popular translations include ‘Tāmaki of a hundred lovers’ or ‘the bride sought by a hundred suitors’.¹ Māori are Tāmaki’s longest-standing arable farmers and gardeners. In the early days of the settlement of ‘Auckland’ they not only fed European settlers, but also established a booming horticultural economy. In 1853, William Swainson observed that in a single year, “...1,792 native canoes entered Auckland harbour bringing to market by this means alone 200 tons of potatoes, 1400 baskets of onions, 1700 baskets of maize, 1200 baskets of peaches besides very many tons of firewood, fish, pigs and kauri gum.”² Governor Grey’s proclamation on 9 July 1863 was read to Rangatira from Ihumātao, Māngere, Pūkaki, Patumāhoe, Tūākau, and Pōkeno giving them the ultimatum to either pledge allegiance to the Crown or flee to the Mangatāwhiri, where three days later, a 380-strong imperial militia was stationed.³ Colonial violence not only resulted in devastating loss of life, but coincided with the alienation of the land from Māori,

¹ Margaret McClure, “Auckland region - Māori history”, Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, Aug 1, 2016 <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/auckland-region/page-6>; Waitangi Tribunal, *Waitangi Tribunal Report on the Ōrākei Claim* (Wai-9), Wellington: Brooker & Friend, 1987), 16.

² William Swainson, “New Zealand and its Colonization”, (London: Smith, Elder And Co., 1859), 66.

³ “The War In Auckland”. *Taranaki Herald*, August 1, 1863, 3.
https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/TH18630801.2.10?end_date=31-12-1863&items_per_page=10&query=+Cameron+Mangatawhiri&snippet=true&start_date=01-01-1863

and the severance of community ties, all of which brought the downfall of prosperous Māori economies of the 1850s. Māori established many of the agricultural and horticultural spaces in Tāmaki Makaurau. For example, in and around Manakau, gardens already cultivated by Māori, remained as agricultural or horticultural plots but with Pākehā occupancy.⁴



Māori who returned to Tāmaki worked in various professions, but land-based occupations were a key site of cross-cultural encounters. Chinese people would not only lease land from Māori to establish market gardens, but they would employ Māori labourers to work alongside them. From the 1920s, a significant number of Māori worked on Indian-led market gardens near Pukekohe; Indian hawkers would visit pā to sell and trade wares. On the gumfields, Māori and Dalmatians often worked together; the term Tarara (‘fast-talkers’) evolved as a descriptor for those of mixed Croatian-Māori heritage.⁵ Although diverse circumstances brought these groups together, a commonality was that they were all largely excluded from the colonial ‘melting-pot’, and that their existence as independent and inter-related communities was consistently challenged.

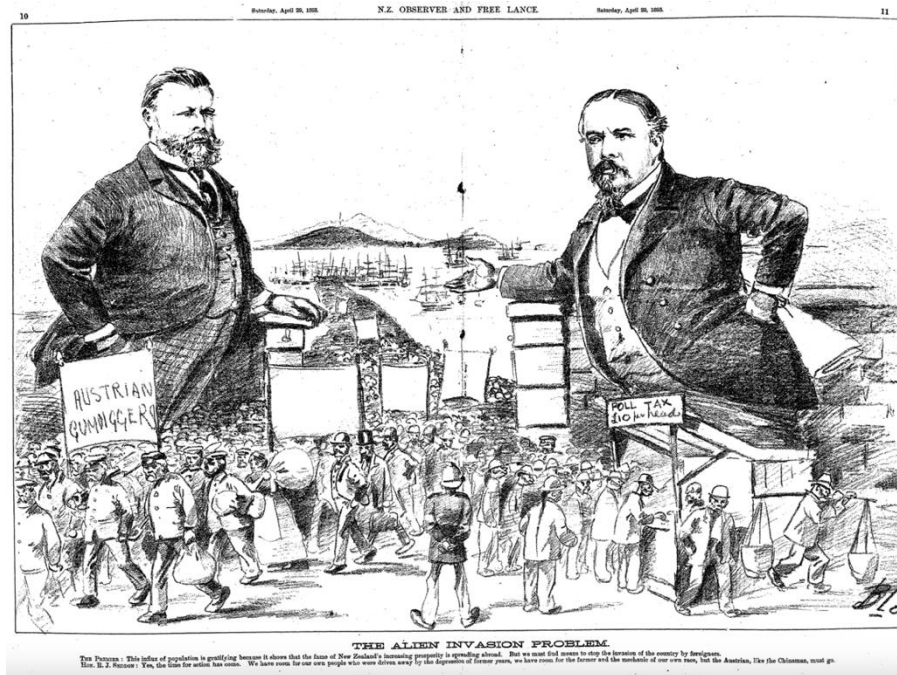


Whare and Garden, Circa 1900

⁴ Susan Bulmer, *Prehistoric Polynesian Gardens at Wiri : Paper Presented to the International Congress of Archaeological and Ethnological Sciences, Vancouver, August 1983*. Auckland, N.Z: S. Bulmer], 1983, Special Collections, University of Auckland Learning and Library Services 995 U58 1983/04, 5.

⁵ Carl Walrond, 'Dalmatians - Dalmatian culture', Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, March 1 2015, <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/dalmatians/page-6>.

While their interactions are outside the scope of this work, it is important to acknowledge that a core tenet of anti-immigration discourse in Aotearoa was to prevent new migrant groups from mingling with Māori. Horticultural practices in Auckland, and Aotearoa more broadly, involved aggregate indigenous methodologies. Māori wisdom and assistance was essential for new migrants seeking to adapt their horticultural practices to the New Zealand environment. This is a rich and important topic and deserves continued kōrero, but due again to word and time limits, these articles are not able to explore these practices in depth.



This project looked at three case studies: Chinese market gardeners and grocers, Dalmatian gardeners and winegrowers, and immigrant hawkers, with the aim of exploring how prejudiced regulations impacted their livelihoods. Each article takes note of how communities mobilised to respond to restrictions and vocalised their rights. The themes in this work remain highly relevant, despite the urbanisation that Auckland has undergone since the 1920s, and the shifting of horticultural centres to other regions. Then and now, the blame is consistently placed on immigrants for ‘taking’ or ‘stealing’ jobs. In 1895, MP William Pember Reeves, in introducing the Asiatic and Other Immigration Restriction Bill posited “...industry is not at a premium in this country...I feel certain that if every [Chinese person] were to leave tomorrow their vacant places could be filled...by British subjects.”⁶ The 1890s-1920s period had depressions at both poles, which heightened fears of immigrant ‘takeover’, in 1909 the Auckland Industrial Union of Gumdiggers, writing against Dalmatian naturalisation, implored ministers, “...Charity begins at home...”⁷

⁶ New Zealand, *Parliamentary Debates* v.89, Legislative Council and House of Representatives, 1895, (William Pember Reeves, Member of Parliament), 347 <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.32106019787982>.

⁷ Letter of Auckland Union of Industrial Gumdiggers to Prime Minister of the Dominion of New Zealand, his ministers and Members of the House of Representatives, June 16, 1909. University of Auckland Libraries and Learning Services, George Matthew Fowlds papers 1906-1965, MSS & Archives MSS A-18 2/5

However, these narratives of ‘influx’ were not justified by numbers alone, offering insight into the endless double-standards of New Zealand colonial thought. ‘Industriousness’ was the hallmark quality of British colonists, but a ‘lecherous’ characteristic of non-British settlers. While the state actively facilitated the passage of British subjects to Aotearoa for a shot at a better life, it gave little sympathy to non-British people looking to do the same. The ‘unskilled’ labour of migrants was, when done by Pākehā, the ‘hard yards’. Where non-



Title of a 1993 article by the Auckland Central Leader

British immigrants were considered ‘birds of passage’ for making money and returning to their home countries, it was no issue when British settlers did exactly that. The list of paradoxes goes on. Today, migrant labourers in Aotearoa still find themselves subject to the pendulum of popular opinion. Gardens, orchards, and vineyards are dependent on seasonal workers from other countries, and many argue that ‘kiwis’ won’t or don’t want to do that type of work.⁸ The exploitation of migrant workers in Aotearoa is a pressing issue and, unlike the 1890s to 1920s, worker conditions are not blamed on the workers themselves. In understanding the history of migrant communities, it is important to acknowledge the role government and local political bodies played in making conditions worse for migrants by imposing levies, restrictions, and interring ‘enemy aliens’ (during the First World War) to work for the state for free. Despite this unwelcoming climate, allies to minority communities did exist and played an important role. Growers, like Jack Turner, then the face of T&G, gave loans to, employed, and promoted Chinese market gardeners. Other supporters were union and legal advocates, like J. R. Lundon, and Devon Prendergast defended Indian hawkers and Mr Dickinson defended Chinese gardeners and fruiterers. Mr Black and Mr O’Conner of Pukekohe leased land, cottages, and tractors to Indian migrants to establish market gardens.⁹

⁸ Megan Gattey, "Here are some of the jobs that Kiwis can't, or won't, do," Stuff, March 14, 2018 <https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/102243731/here-are-some-of-the-jobs-that-kiwis-cant-or-wont-do#:~:text=Professor%20Paul%20Spoonley%2C%20Massey%20University,term%20career%20associated%20with%20them.>

⁹ Tribhovandas (‘Sam’) Girdhar oral history interview by William Joseph Short, August 28, 1961. Auckland Libraries. Auckland Libraries Heritage Collections OH-1471-014.



This project primarily focuses on the self-determination of various groups and engages with the prevalent – and unsettling – racist social milieu of the 1890s-1920s. Looking at horticultural histories in this way enriches our understanding of present-day Aotearoa and investigate the relationship between labour, migration, and prejudice. Today, Tāmaki Makaurau is one of the most culturally diverse cities in the world, but throughout the 19th and 20th centuries various actors made attempts to maintain the opposite. Analysing these histories in conjunction with one another fosters deep historical empathy, celebrates the little-discussed, and grounds us in our understanding of Auckland today.

Images

Unknown. "Martin's Farm at Auckland & Gt. South Road New Zealand. Which was stockaded & garrisoned during the war". Photograph. Circa 1863. Auckland Museum Collections Online PH-ALB-510-p3-1.

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