

## Timelines in Te Kowhai History

### The Church Buildings of Te Kowhai

The district has seen a number of church venues over the last 160 years. Earlier services were in private homes, in public facilities such as the school room or the hall. Later, most were dedicated in structures.

The first church in the Te Kowhai area was built by Wiremu Patene, a Māori Chief and warrior of the Ngāti Tamainupo hapu, who converted to Christianity in the 1850s. He built a Wesleyan Church in **1859**, on the banks of the giant oxbow in the Waipa River (now the Collie Road area). Records suggest this oxbow was called 'The Maka' (the fishhook), from its distinctive hook-like shape. Associated with this church at the Te Kowhai kāinga were a number of whare and the settlement was meant to also have a rununga, or European-styled courthouse.



*The first Te Kowhai church, photographed in 1859. It was still standing in 1873, but nothing is known of its eventual fate. The highly respected Ngāti Mahuta chief, Takerei, of Te Kowhai, is seated (on right, with white blanket).*

*From the Sir George Grey Special Collections, Auckland Libraries.*

During the early **1890s**, the Te Kowhai School at Stones Corner (Bedford Road north) was used for Sunday church services. When the school was relocated to Richards Road in **1892**, and again in **1899**, it too was the local focus for religious (and social) events. Thereafter, the Te Kowhai District began to erect dedicated church buildings.

## The Anglican Church

**1903.** The Saint Stephens Anglican Church was built on Collie Road in 1903 on land donated by the Sager family. The church was designed in a 'simple Gothic Revival style' and constructed from heart kahikatea, milled at Taupiri. Saint Stephens was built for £174.2s.1d (about \$350). The four founders of the church were Charles Limmer (of Limmer Road), Robert Nicholson, Howarth Sager and Alfred Corbett (the latter all of Collie Road).



*The consecration of the Collie Road Church site on 20 June 1903. The church was consecrated by Bishop Neligan. Photo lent by Len McBride to Hamilton City Libraries (HCL-4077).*

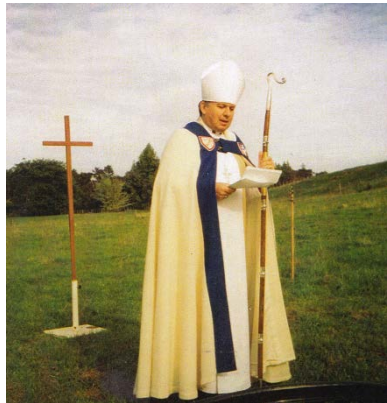
**1950.** By this time, the central village of today had begun to prosper and it was proposed to shift the church from its lonely location 'out west'. This was done in **1955**. Victor and Ethel Henton made available land from their farm to the new church site.



*The Saint Stephen's Church was carted by truck to the new central village area in 1955.  
Right: a 2016 photo of the church's interior.*

*Barbara (Hartstone) Bennett archives & Jamie Ellis photo.*

**2003.** The Saint Stephens Church celebrated the 100 years of this church with a re-enactment of the 1903 arrival of the Bishop at the Collie Road site.



*The Right Reverend David Moxon, Bishop of Waikato, on 9 March 2003, taking the centennial service, on the original Collie Road site. Dianna & Pat Plant photo.*

### **The Methodist Church**

**1909.** The Victoria Church, named after the late Queen, was built for the Waihi goldfields rush in 1901. When the gold ran out, the church was advertised for sale. Te Kowhai was about to construct their own church. However, Te Kowhai's Rev. Blamires reported:

*That the Waitekauri Church, 37 feet x 25 feet, built of kauri, containing 20 seats, 1 pulpit, 6 lamps, 11 yards of matting and a porch, all in thoroughly good order, could be purchased for £59 (\$118).*

Having acquired the church, the Te Kowhai Trustees let a tender for '£67 (\$134) for taking down, re-erecting and painting of the church'. It had to be cut into sections for removal. The portions were to be taken by rail (probably to the Pukete Railway Station on Onion Road). However, due to tunnels in the Waihi Gorge, the Railway Department refused to cart the church unless a special train was bought in, at an extra cost of £25. A carrier from Paeroa bypassed the rail-route, using two large wagons pulled by horses, at a cost of £20 (\$40). Thereafter the railways undertook the cartage again.

The total cost of the church and organ was £200 (\$400), with £80 (\$160) raised by subscription from within the district, £20 (\$40) raised in the opening service and the balance borrowed from the Trustees. Two hundred people attended its opening on 4 July **1909**. The founding trustees of the church included: Rev. Blamires, Thomas Rothwell, David Fullerton, William Harris, Rollo Gillespie, John Duck, Charles Neal and William Gibbs.

**1955.** It became the St. Marks Union Church, uniting the Methodist and Presbyterian faiths. The Te Kowhai Church was handed over to The NZ Methodist Church in **1983**.

**2007.** The church was condemned as structurally unsafe. A generous benefactor from Frankton paid for its rebuild.

**2009.** The St. Marks congregation celebrated one hundred years of use of the Te Kowhai Church, with a special service, followed by a luncheon at the Community Hall and a benediction.



*In 1952, John Hockin and local helpers built the Methodist Hall at a cost of £600 (\$1,200). This was used as a community venue during the demolition of the first Te Kowhai public hall and during the construction of the War Memorial Hall. Right: 1965. The celebration of renovations of the St. Marks Church.*

### **The Catholic Church**

The Catholic Church has never had a dedicated building in Te Kowhai. In the **1920s**, Father Eugene O’connor, of the Frankton Parish, came out to Te Kowhai Hall every second Sunday to take service (Mass). Afterwards, he would join Thomas and Mater Jones for lunch at their Fullerton Road property.



*The congregation of the Te Kowhai Catholic Church, at the original public hall, in 1920.*

*Patricia (Koller) Hancock photo.*



## Some of our pioneering people



*From left: Wiremu Patene (William Barton), Wesleyan Minister around 1859; Rev. Blamires; Haworth & Edith Sager and Ethel & Victor Henton, land donors for the 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> Saint Stephen's site; William Harris, land donor for the St. Marks Church.*