

## Te Kooti Rikirangi Turuki

'A prophet, a strategic planner and military genius, and one of the most prolific songwriters and composers New Zealand ever produced'... these are words that Dr. Haare Williams used to describe Te Kooti.

In the 1860's during the siege against the Paimarire at Waerenga-a-Hika near Gisborne, Te Kooti fought on the side of the Government. He was accused of spying for the Paimarire force and arrested. Released due to lack of evidence against him, he was again arrested on charges of supplying the Paimarire force with ammunition. Even with these charges unproven he was exiled to Wharekauri (Chatham Island).

During his time on Wharekauri Te Kooti experienced a spiritual awakening and was instructed to teach his people and be a voice for them when needed. He founded Te Haahi Ringatu (the Faith of the Upraised Hand). It became known as the religion of Te Wairua Tapu or Holy Spirit. Ringatu was founded on the Old Testament of the Bible, and closely allied with the Hebrew faith.

In 1868 Te Kooti led the escape of 168 prisoners, capturing the schooner *Rifleman* that was visiting Wharekauri to re-supply. The prisoners sailed the ship back to Whareongaonga in the North Island. From then Te Kooti was a wanted man as the military searched for him. 'Te Kooti's War' saw him hunted across the motu until 1883. During that time his Ringatu followers grew as he spoke of the faith and of reclaiming the land from Pākehā.

After being driven from shelter of the Urewera he took refuge with Te Kingitanga. Whilst in Te Rohe Potae o Maniapoto (the King Country) he developed the rituals and sacred days of the faith. Saturday was elected as the sabbath day following the Jewish teachings. Te Kooti set aside the 12<sup>th</sup> as the sacred day of the month, remembering the great things that had happened on the 12<sup>th</sup> day, e.g. when the faith was revealed to him on Wharekauri, the safe landing at Whareongaonga, and 12<sup>th</sup> February 1883 when he was met by Minister John Bryce to declare his pardoning by the Government.

Te Kooti established an enduring legacy in the Ringatu Church– there are thousands of followers in Aotearoa NZ today. Gatherings on marae for the Tekaumarua (12<sup>th</sup> day) are still adhered to, beginning on the afternoon of the 11<sup>th</sup>. Old waiata (songs), panui (notices), karakia (prayers) and himene (hymns) are recited at these gatherings.

Te Wepu (the whip) is the name of the battle flag that Te Kooti captured from Ngati Kahungunu and used while he was in residence at Te Porere. There are two variants of the flag – the most common has symbols of the crescent moon, red cross, and WI (a reference to the Holy Spirit). The other flag has the mountain, bleeding heart and a star.

In the 1870s while living under the shelter of Te Kingitanga, Te Kooti built and gifted the wharehau Te Tokanganui-a-Noho (in Te Kuiti), to the Ngāti Maniapoto people for their hospitality. Te Kooti and his followers assisted in the building of over 40 meeting houses. He was known as an innovative artist, adding colour into whakairo (carving) and kowhaiwhai (woven designs) that adorned these houses - this referenced the Ringatu influence.

The government wanted access to develop a railroad through the King Country in 1883. In negotiations for access with King Tawhio an agreement was reached that amnesty be granted to those who had committed crimes in earlier days. Te Kooti was then pardoned.

Te Kooti had written many waiata and himene. According to some historians, after he was pardoned, Te Kooti travelled to different iwi that he had wronged in some way to apologise and gift waiata to them. Te Kooti modified a well-known oriori (lullaby) called Pinepine te Kura and gifted this song to the people of Te Rongopai Marae in Poverty Bay.

Te Kooti was not able to return to Poverty Bay due to the strife caused, so he resided in Ohiwa Harbour on the land which was given to him. History says that he died at Te Karaka on the harbour shore, and was taken to Maromahue Marae, Waioatahe to be buried. His followers later exhumed his body and buried him in an unknown location.

## References:

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