

EXOTIC TREES THAT SURVIVED THE TARAWERA ERUPTION 1886

(This article written by the Rotorua Tree Council was originally printed in the Daily Post Weekender on 22-11-02).

Situated on a hillside overlooking Lake Tarawera, examples of some of the older exotic trees planted in the Rotorua District can be found. Many of them were planted before the Tarawera eruption of 1886, and they managed to survive the outpouring of ash and mud that smothered much of the local vegetation. If you have been to the nearby Buried Village, you will know how deep the ash layer formed by the volcanic fall-out was.

In the early 1850s, the well-known local missionary Rev. Seymour Mills Spencer, (Spencer Road at Tarawera is named after him), began to carry out a plan he had been working on for some time. This was to develop a model village for Maori and to provide local employment through the growing of wheat and maize for a new local flour mill. A site 3.5 kilometres from his Kariri (Galilee) Point mission station was chosen and Te Wairoa was born.

Reverend Spencer built a church and a house near Te Wairoa. Known as Te Mu, this station became the new base for Christian teaching in the area. The perceived danger from the Hauhau movement eventually caused the closure of the mission and the Spencer family moved out.

Today, many of the trees at Te Mu remain as a memorial to the work of Reverend Spencer and his followers at Te Mu. The most notable of these are:

Japanese Walnut (*Juglans cordiformis* var *ailantifolia*). This is possibly the oldest tree at Te Mu Station. It is believed to have been planted about 1860. As the common name indicates, it is a native of Japan, where it can reach a height of 15 metres. The

example at Te Mu is approximately 9 metres tall. One of the most striking features of this species is the huge size and attractive appearance of the leaves.

Common English Oak (*Quercus robur*). There are three English oaks on the property, all in good condition. This species is a native of Europe and south-western Asia. Many people will be aware of the historic importance of oak timber for naval ship construction. It is also used for producing fine furniture, panelling and many other articles. The trees make a wonderful contribution to the landscape in parks and large gardens.

Common English Yew (*Taxus baccata*). This tree is believed to have been planted about 1870, and is still thriving. Yews are noted for their longevity, and are often mentioned in history books and legends. They were very popular for making longbows, and for ornamental hedges and topiary in the gardens of the well-to-do. The Common English Yew is a native of Europe, western Asia and North Africa.

Poplar (*Populus* spp.). Several species of poplar, planted around 1870, can be seen at the Te Mu Mission site. These trees are easily recognised by their great height towering over the property. In 1997, one of the cottonwood poplars (*P. deltoides*) was 48 metres tall, and had a diameter of 197 cm.