

In the last edition of the Society's Newsletter, reference was made to the Hukutaia Domain, Opotiki and to Mr. Norman Potts. A friend of Mr. Potts, Mr. Marc Heginbotham, who is deeply involved with the collecting and planting in the Domain, contributed the following brief account of some aspects of Mr. Potts' life and work. Mr. Potts was a country member of this Society for many years, so this account will be of considerable interest.

A.J.D.

NORMAN POTTS - OPOTIKI

M. HEGINBOTHAM

Norman Potts was born at Christchurch in April 1886. He was descended from fine pioneer stock. His grandfather, T.H. Potts, was a well-known ornithologist, Fellow of the Linnaean Society, and author of many New Zealand pamphlets and of "Out in the Open". Both T.H. Potts and his son Donald, Norman's father, figure largely in the research done in Walter Buller's "History of the Birds of New Zealand". Mt. Potts and the Potts River in Canterbury bear his grandfather's name. Norman's mother, Ann, was a beautiful woman of Irish gentry from Killarney. Her parents were Protestants in the Roman Catholic south of Ireland. The family, one son and three daughters, dropped the name of Ryan and took that of Raine before coming to Christchurch.

Norman's babyhood was spent near Waipukurau at Mt. Herbert Station where his father was manager. It was here that he probably developed his great interest in nature and the Maori people by his boyhood wanderings from his home to explore the coast and Cape Kidnappers, where he watched the bird rookeries and collected artifacts among the sandhills.

He and two of his three brothers went to boarding school at Heretaunga. While there he won a gold and two silver medals for tennis and two challenge cups for running. He matriculated from Heretaunga and went on to Canterbury College to study law. It was in Christchurch that he was employed for several years by Duncan, Cotterill and Stringer, a large, well-known law firm. It was here also that he met a first cousin Myra Dobson, also a student at the college and his wife to be. It is interesting to note here that Myra's uncle, Arthur Dobson, discovered 'Arthur's Pass' and also had a town and river named after him, while an aunt, Mary Dobson, married Julius von Haast who has many features named in his honour - a town, pass, a mountain range, river and numerous plants.

As soon as Norman Potts had gained his Solicitor's degree he left for the North Island, arriving at Thames in 1912. Here he hired a horse and gig, then set off on an exploratory journey into the Bay of Plenty in search of a suitable town in which to practice law. He chose to settle in Opotiki, a place where he could indulge his love of fishing and of searching along the beaches and dunes, among the hills and bush, to learn more of the Maori, both ancient and modern. He was

also guaranteed sufficient work by Mr. George Shalfoon, a businessman of Syrian descent in Opotiki, and this finalised the choice even in the face of three existing lawyers in the town. In 1914 he married his cousin Myra and they had four children, three of whom are still living; one son, a pilot in the last war, went missing over Germany.

Norman Potts is chiefly remembered in Opotiki for his work in the Hukutaia Domain. However, he always said that people were the most interesting things in the world. What went on in their minds and why did they act as they did? This, no doubt, was part of his profession as a solicitor. People, definitely, were his 'first love' !

His second great interest was botany and the New Zealand flora which he began studying soon after his marriage, mainly from books, and sometime later with the assistance of two botanists, Miss.L.Moore and Miss.L.Cranwell. He became interested in the Domain after it was declared a recreation reserve in the N.Z. Gazette, dated May 26th., 1926, and later a Domain in July, when the first committee was formed. In 1933 Norman Potts was appointed Chairman and under his direction the restoration of what had become a deteriorated tract of country was pursued, as well as making the Domain a living museum of New Zealand plants. He planted some thousands of plants (3036 by 1939, 3334 by 1940, 5000 by 1954, an estimated 7000 by 1970) covering hundreds of species and kept records of the source of origin of each. He also performed a national service by making available to various public gardens, societies and individuals throughout New Zealand, various seeds and plants which he was particularly able to supply. He also exchanged seeds with botanists as far away as London and Sweden. He made frequent visits to distant parts of New Zealand gathering plant material and climbed almost every mountain in the Southern Alps, all the well-known mountains in the North Island, and many others besides. Often he was in the company of professional botanists such as Dr. Lucy Moore, Mrs. Watson-Smith (then Lucy Cranwell), G.O.K. Sainsbury (they climbed Mt. Tapuaeenuku together) and many others, including numerous amateur enthusiasts like himself. He had frequent correspondence with Dr. Cockayne, Dr. Allan and with Mr. W. Brookie and Mr. R. Mole, both of the Otari Native Plant Museum, Wellington. In 1944 Norman Potts was awarded the Loder Cup for his work in the Domain and his services in the cultivation and preservation of New Zealand flora.

His more important discoveries and which bear his name are:-

Myosotis petiolata var. pottsiana was described in the Flora of New Zealand in 1961 by Dr. L.B. Moore with the postscript, "The variety is named after Mr. Norman Potts of Opotiki who brought the plants into cultivation and distributed them to several gardens where they have maintained their characteristics through several generations of seed". Var. pottsiana is known only from the type locality, the base of Mt. Misery on the Te Waiti stream, a tributary of the Otara River, Opotiki.

Scirpus pottsii was described in 1953 (Cook, T.R.S.N.Z. 81, 157). The paper cites collections of the species from several localities including one in 1943 by N. Potts from the Waioka River,

Opotiki. S. pottsii is a grass-like sedge, usually less than a foot high, and grows in damp, open places.

Coriaria pottsiana, a dwarf tutu, was described in 1942 by W.R.B. Oliver (Rec. Dom. Mus. 1, 24). He stated, "C. pottsiana was discovered by Mr. N. Potts in company with Miss. L. Cranwell and Miss. L.B. Moore on March 28th., 1932, on a large shingle slip on the north face of Mt. Hikurangi, level with the upper limit of the beech forest. Mr. Potts gathered plants and has since grown them in his garden at Opotiki, where they have flowered and fruited. The type specimen in the Dominion Museum was taken from one of the plants growing in Mr. Potts' garden. Mr. Potts is an enthusiastic botanist who has grown many thousands of native plants in his own and public gardens in Opotiki; it gives me pleasure to name after him this remarkable little species of Coriaria."

Norman Potts will also be remembered for his rugged and great physical capacity, his determination. He climbed Mt. Hikurangi (5750') for the third time when 72 years old, and he climbed Mt. Edgecombe (2693') near Kawerau, also for the third time, in the company of a grandson, when 80 years of age.

Norman's 'third love' was the Maori people, their culture, their history, and their language. No doubt this started from boyhood but developed in full at Opotiki where he was in continuous contact with Maoris, both professionally and privately. He was an avid reader of their life and ways, he collected numerous artifacts and he learnt the language from a Maori tutor. He wrote Maori easily and spoke it correctly. He and Mr. Elsdon Best, a noted authority, corresponded and later he visited Ruatahuna and Maungapohatu and saw the old cottage where Mr. Best once lived.

Norman Potts died on November 16th., 1970 at the age of 84 years. His many friends dedicated a memorial to him at the entrance of Hukutaia Domain and this takes the form of a 'seat-gate' combination and new fence 'posts', all of Hinuera stone. Set in one of the gate pillars is a plaque that reads:-

This gate and seat are given by the friends of Norman Potts in memory and appreciation of the work he did for the Native Flora in the Domain.

Haere Ki te Reinga

April 1886- Nov. 1970.