

Okawa Bay Barge Wreck

(as related by Michael and Hilma Gill (former residents of Okawa Bay))



Carving by Albert Te Pou

The Kauri timber from which this carving was made came from a barge that travelled Lake Rotoiti in the early part of the 20th century carrying felled logs from the Eastern end to the Western end where there was a saw mill at Okawa Bay.

Logan Brothers, boat builders, built the barge from Kauri extracted from forests in Northland. Since the 1880's yachts and launches from the yards and sheds of the Logan family have always stood out as shining examples of designers and builders arts. Contemporary reports would invariably describe these boats as having the Logan "style", immediately marking them as outstanding.

Whilst the boats and the yard name are well known throughout New Zealand, the people who created them are not. Robert Logan senior and his sons John, James, Robert, Arch and Willie were all involved in various aspects of the consummate firm known as Logan Brothers, as were Arch's grandsons, Jack and Doug. The family eschewed publicity, preferring their product to speak for them.

The barge caught fire one day and burned to the water line, and was sunk on the edge of the Bay south of the sawmill. As time went by the land around the Bay was cut into sections by Mr Henry Mitchell and sold.

The old mill was retired, and the sunken barge caused the edge of the lake to accrete around it. It was soon after a skier had damaged himself rather badly on the metal bolts of the wreck that one of the nearby residents, Michael Gill, decided it should be removed and took it upon himself to hire a digger to extract it from the lake bed. Matt Tamehana, the local Kaumatua at the time, supervised the raising of the wreck and gave directions for its disposal as the barge had been declared tapu.

Most of the planks were damaged in the process of extraction but much of it was usable timber. It was decided to gift the timber to the Te Puia Carving School, formerly the New Zealand Maori Arts & Crafts Institute, Whakarewarewa where it was put to good use. The Manager at the time and Master Carver, Albert Te Pou, made this carving himself (he would not let any of the students touch it) and gifted it to Michael & Hilma Gill on 25th October 1993.

The symbols on the piece are pertinent to the area and people of Mourea and Lake Rotoiti so Michael & Hilma decided that the carving should remain in the Rotorua area and gifted it to the Rotorua Museum.

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