



GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN: The original Stevenson family headstone. Stevenson family descendant Graeme Torrie is unimpressed that up to 500 Makaraka Cemetery headstones, including the Stevenson one, were removed and destroyed in the early 1970s. The headstones helped to record Gisborne's early colonial era history, he said. Picture supplied



Long-forgotten family history brought to life

by Wynsley Wrigley

RETIRED teacher Graeme Torrie is well known to generations of former students but it is local genealogy that has inspired his passion in recent times. Mr Torrie and other relatives have been researching the life of his great-great-grandfather Samuel Stevenson, an original Gisborne borough councillor, the licensee of the Roseland and Royal Taverns in the 1880s and 1890s, and a survivor of the attack on Matawhero in 1868, by a war party led by Te Kooti. The research into genealogy and earnings of long-forgotten history not only led to a well-attended Stevenson family reunion, but fired Mr Torrie's imagination.

"I'm fascinated by the history," he said. "Despite Gisborne being an isolated region, so much history happened here, but people don't know about it."

Mr Stevenson, who died in 1898, has a new headstone at Makaraka Cemetery. It was erected in time for the family reunion. The original was one of about 500 headstones considered to be in poor condition and removed by Cook County Council between 1971 and 1973. They were made into rubble to fill in the Houhoupiko Stream.

The removal and destruction of the headstones was unbelievable and a tragedy, said Mr Torrie. It destroyed local history involving many of the district's earliest settlers.

Numerous descendants attending the reunion did not know the headstone of Mr Stevenson and those of many of his contemporaries had been discarded and destroyed. Mr Torrie said if it was possible, he would like to meet descendants of Hoera Apuaroa, and Tutere and his wife Ariama Whakahira, who saved the lives of Mr Stevenson and his family in 1868. They warned Mr and Mrs Stevenson, their son Silas and other settlers at



MAN ABOUT TOWN: Sam Stevenson was a successful Gisborne businessman and tavern owner who escaped from the 1868 attack at Matawhero, and was the highest polling council candidate in the district's first local body elections held in 1877. Picture supplied

Toanga, north of Matawhero, that a war party led by Te Kooti was attacking settlers.

Mr Whakahira paid for his actions with his life.

Mr Stevenson was born in England in 1844 and arrived in Auckland in 1864 after a 110-day voyage on the Shaw, Savill and Co. vessel Jumna.

He tried his luck — apparently unsuccessfully — in the West Coast gold mines and returned to Auckland before settling in Poverty Bay in September 1866 where he was to become a prominent citizen. He had married Rebecca Doleman in

Parnell, Auckland, in April 1868. Rebecca was born in England in 1848. Mr Stevenson originally worked as a gardener for a Mr Bloomfield at Gray's Bush.

He later ran a store at Toanga then leased land at Matawhero.

Mr Stevenson was successful in business, originally with a livery stable at Makaraka and later in Gisborne with his Masonic Stable.

The Poverty Bay Herald of August 9, 1880, said his business was "a blessing" for Gisborne and Makaraka, with a "strong covered conveyance" and any number of horses as "the road between the two places is such as no language can describe".

Music was another strong interest. Mr Stevenson brought opera and musicals to the district.

His taverns and interests in horse racing and other sports made him a popular identity.

"He was quite a lad," said Mr Torrie. In 1877, Mr Stevenson was the highest polling candidate with 116 votes in the election for the inaugural Gisborne Borough Council.

Mr Stevenson was only 53 when he died in 1898. He had not recovered from a painful neck injury suffered the previous year.

According to the Poverty Bay Herald of July 23, 1897, he had been walking home from town and on the Kaiti approach to the Turanganui bridge stepped aside to make way for "a vehicle".

He fell into the ditch below and may not have been discovered for some time had it not been "for the barking of his faithful dog".

Mr Stevenson's funeral was one of the largest of the era with "forty to fifty carriages whilst a great many attended on horseback and on foot".

Local MP, Cabinet minister, a future knight and deputy prime minister James Carroll wrote in a telegram, "poor old Sam".

HONOURING YOUR PAST: Graeme Torrie at the restored headstone of his great-great-grandfather Samuel Stevenson and other family members, in Gisborne's original cemetery at Makaraka. Mr Torrie says it has been a fascinating experience learning about the exploits of Sam Stevenson, who settled in Poverty Bay in 1866, and the little-known events of his life. Picture by Liam Clayton

"I trust the heartfelt sympathy of all will help to soften the blow, which has fallen on Mrs Stevenson and family, and that every consideration will be tendered in their bereavement.

"Please place a wreath on the coffin in aroha to the memory of our once kind and true friend."

Mrs Stevenson died in 1915. The couple had six children — Silas, Frederick, Sarah, Martha, George and John.

Descendants can trace the family tree through five of the siblings.

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Free Admission

First Round
 Monday 2nd December
 Tuesday 3rd December
 Wednesday 4th December
 10.00am, 2.00pm & 7.00pm

Semi Final
 Friday 6th December
 10.00am, 2.00pm & 7.00pm

Competition Final
 Saturday 7th December
 7.00pm

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