

Heritage Assessment: Kohukohu Historic Reserve Former Kohukohu School

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Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai

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Peer Reviewed by: Maria Butcher

Cover Image: View of the school and pupils taken before 1915, From the Home Comforts Collection

1. Site Overview

Kohukohu in the late nineteenth century was a thriving community riding the wave of the kauri timber boom. The children of the area needed an education, so the first classroom of the Kohukohu School was built in 1883. The school became a focal point for the community, educating many generations of Hokianga families. In 1972 the school was scheduled for demolition. The community banded together to save the original 1883 classroom, but unfortunately the older classrooms were destroyed. Today, the former Kohukohu School is a representative example of a 19th century school, few of which have survived.

Land Status:	Historic Reserve (RAHR) “Kohukohu Historic Reserve” Gazetted 2 nd May 1985.
Administered:	From Kaitaia Area Office.
Location:	Corner Yarborough and Kirkpatrick Streets, Kohukohu.
Visitor numbers:	Unknown.
Heritage Status:	Actively Managed Historic Place (AMHP 61).
Site Area Hectares:	0.1693 hectares (1693 square metres)
Legal Description:	Sec 126, Block X Mangamuka SD (NZ Gazette 1985, p 2090)
AMIS No:	1000 33907
Functional location number:	DN-61-300-4052
Far North District Plan:	Listed in the Schedule of Historic Sites, Buildings and Objects of the District Plan of the Far North District Council. [Appendices, Part 4, Appendix 1E, Item 175.]

2. History Description

Eric Harrison describes the early history of the school:

*‘The school was erected in 1883 on a site purchased three years earlier. It had a shingle roof, one large room and a porch and was expected to accommodate 60 students. From a photograph and an old architects drawing, it appears that the school porch was extended to twice the original size, probably during the 1890’s. The extra space would have been used as a temporary classroom to accommodate the schools rapidly increasing population.’*¹

By 1902, the average attendance at the school was 86 pupils. There were approximately 56 families in the settlement and an estimated 112 children of school age within three miles. Consequently the Auckland Education Board applied for a grant from a “Special Vote for School Buildings” to build another classroom at Kohukohu. The first response from the government was to ask if

¹ E. Harrison, 1981

the expense could be avoided. Could the school accommodate the 90 odd pupils by maybe partitioning a room?



Figure 1: Kohukohu School after the second classroom had been built in 1892 (photo courtesy of Home Comforts, Kaitaia).

The question was ridiculous, and the board proceeded immediately to build the new room in full confidence of receiving the grant to pay for it. When they were notified that the money was available, they were able to reply by return mail that the building had already been completed.

Kohukohu was fortunate in getting its third room before the war tightened the Governments purse strings, the additions were completed in August 1915. Kohukohu was never cramped for room space again.²

The school had been built over 32 years at a total cost of about 800 pounds. However in the years to come, thousands would be spent vainly trying to stabilise the slumping ground it was built on. The first retaining wall was built for 264 pound, already to late. By 1936 the asphalt was worn and broken, some portions having sunk, and others pushed up by pressure from the hill at the back.

By 1937 the school was unsuitable in many respects. The inspector wrote:

² E. Harrison , 1981, p 8

*'The school is a rambling old structure of three large rooms and two large porches. Only two rooms are occupied. The school is practically certain to remain a two teacher school for years. In our opinion it should be remodelled to make a compact 2 roomed school.'*³

Plans were drawn up to demolish the original wing and half the porch, to build a staff room and do essential maintenance. However in the summer of 1938 Rawhia School was closed. Rawhia's remaining children were all ferried to Kohukohu. The third classroom was needed again.

At the outbreak of the war the school was again in urgent need of repair. The buildings were in "a parlous state," with sinking foundations and undulating floors. The school committee proposed that the building be restored, or else a new school built in a more central location. Nothing was done to restore the building; however in 1944 a shed was built to provide free milk to the children. The following year a dental clinic was constructed for 700 pounds and in 1949-50 a septic tank system was installed at a cost of 845 pounds.

In October 1958, the school was within a whisker of burning down. About 6.30pm fifteen year old Henry White was delivering newspapers when he noticed a fire in the head masters room of the school. He immediately summoned help and broke into the building through a window and soon extinguished the blaze with buckets of water. Henry was commended for his quick action, though many people would have been happy to see the old school burn.

In 1959 the board, despite strong advice to the contrary, decided to bulldoze a new playing ground at the back of the school. As anticipated this triggered an enormous landslide, deluging the grounds with tons of soil trees and mud. The cleanup and repair work cost the board 1520 pounds.⁴

After many years of negotiating it was decided that the school was too expensive to maintain and had insufficient playground area and that a new school should be built. Tenders were called for the construction of the (new) school in October 1971. It was officially opened on 16th December 1972. When a school building is vacated '*the vultures gather round*'⁵ as one inspector aptly put it. The old school building was used temporarily by the play centre, but many people were interested in purchasing the building and/or the site. However the instability of the land, and the drainage problems, meant the old schools future looked dim. For two years the Department of Lands and Survey offered the building to any club or group prepared to maintain and use it. When they received no response, tenders were let for demolition in 1977.

As a result the Kohukohu Historic Society was formed to save the building. They realised it was beyond their capacities to restore the entire building, so a

³ Cited in E Harrison 1981, p 87

⁴ E. Harrison., 1981, p 86

⁵ Cited in E Harrison 1981, 90

compromise was reached whereby two thirds was demolished and the original portion built in 1883 was left standing.⁶

The building has been managed by several groups since then but now is managed by the Old School Action Group under the umbrella of the Kohukohu Conservation and Re-creation Society who were gazetted to “control and manage” the building in 2005.⁷

3. Fabric Description

The Kohukohu School is a single story kauri timber structure with attractive multi-pane windows. It is a simple utilitarian design typical of buildings of its day with high studs, a steep pitched roof and ceilings. It had a wooden shingle roof which at some point was replaced with corrugated iron. Originally it did have some decorative mouldings outside above the windows, but none of these remain. It began as a single classroom and was extended twice finally ending up as a three classroom school. A more detailed description of the fabric can be found in the Appendices.

4. Cultural Connections

Because the “old” school only closed in 1973 there are still large numbers of people in Kohukohu, the wider Northern Hokianga and across New Zealand who attended this school. According to locals and neighbours, people come to see what has happened to their old school. They are disappointed that some of it has gone but thankful that a part still remains. The school was one constant in the community for 100 years, through hard times and good times.

In 1996, it was decided to hold a Jubilee to celebrate the schools 85th anniversary. It was held on Labour weekend and over 600 people from all over New Zealand turned up.⁸

Since the school closed it has been well used by the community as one of the only small to med sized venues available in the town. It has been used for many things over the years, dance, yoga, musical recitals, bone carving, religious gatherings and meetings.

5. National Context

This site represents the following site types from AMIS: Government Service (Education). No National context study is available to provide a comprehensive basis to assessing the national (representative) significance of this site.

⁶ E. Harrison, 1981, p 90

⁷ NZ Gazette 2005 No 105, p 2499

⁸ E. Harrison, 1981, p 88

Very few schools of this age and style exist in Northland, still on their original site that are not surrounded by or attached to newer buildings of varying styles and ages.



Figure 2: School building circa 2007 after new roof (image: A Macrae).

6. Historic Significance

The significance of the Kohukohu School has been summarised by the New Zealand Historic Places Trust:

*'Kohukohu School has historical significance as a representative of a nineteenth century school and reflects the development of education in New Zealand in general and in the Hokianga from a period shortly after passing of the Education Act 1877. The significant contribution made by small local populations to the sacrifice New Zealanders bore in the conflict of 1914-1918 is brought to mind in its relocated Memorial Gate. Kohukohu School was influenced by and therefore closely reflects the development of the town and the Hokianga more generally.'*⁹

⁹ S. Park. 2010, p 20

7. Fabric Significance

The Kohukohu School is representative of wooden school building of its era. Although part of the building has been destroyed, it is important to note that the oldest section has survived in its original location. Other school buildings of this type have not survived, which increases the significance of the Kohukohu School.

The Historic Places Trust describes the significance of the fabric:

*'Additions made to the school over time were subsequently removed and the original building remains intact as a good representative example of the typical one room school from the nineteenth century'*¹⁰

The Old Kohukohu School is also the site of the remains of a set of World War I Memorial gates. The gate posts have been re-sited at the new Kohukohu School but the iron pipe railing fence that was attached to the gate posts still remain at the school. The War Memorial gates are a Category II Historic Place Register No 9526.¹¹ The remaining iron pipe railing fence is registered along with the school as a Historic Place.

8. Cultural Significance

From the New Zealand Historic Places Trust:

*'Kohukohu School has had social significance as a place of education and community gathering for over 120 years. Parents sought to ensure that the school in their community provided the best possible education for their children, and their efforts to do this provided a focus for community activity at several significant periods during the schools history. More generally, accounts of the schools history provide many examples of the school acting as a focus for community activity, in fund raising, in prize giving, in sports activities and so on. The Kohukohu community made a significant commitment to saving the original school building from threat of demolition in the 1980s, and continues to manage and support it as a community facility. While the social significance of the school has thus changed with its new use, it remains a vital part of the social fabric of the town.'*¹²

The school was once the location of a set of Memorial Gates honouring the eighteen former school pupils who died in World War One. These gates were probably installed in the 1920s¹³ and then moved to the new school in the 1970s.¹⁴ Stuart Park of the NZ Historic Places Trust:

¹⁰ S. Park. 2010, p 22

¹¹ New Zealand Historic Places Trust, www.historic.org.nz/TheRegister/RegisterSearch

¹² S.Park. 2010, pg 21

¹³ S.Park. 2010, *Registration Report, World war One Memorial Gate, Kohukohu School, Kohukohu* pg 3

*The considerable loss of life experienced by many New Zealand communities in World War one has been argued to be one of the most significant events in the formulation of the New Zealand national character. The War memorial gate in Kohukohu is one of the many memorials erected in New Zealand after World War I (--)*The Kohukohu Gate also documents the significant proportion of this towns school pupils who lost their lives in the war¹⁵. The community valued the Memorial gate sufficiently highly to ensure that it was relocated to the new school when that opened in 1972.¹⁶



Figure 3:: Memorial gates as they were in 1940. (photo credit Francie Wilson)

9. Management Recommendations

- Continue to maintain fabric according to best practise.
- Continue to maintain the grounds as per work plans in AMIS.
- Continue to work and maintain relationships with the wider community and the “control and manage” group.
- Design and erect appropriate interpretation/signage.
- Continue to use regular visual inspections and the Condition Assessment Report to drive maintenance programme

10. Management History

1880: Site for school purchased.

¹⁴ ibid

¹⁵ S.Park 2010, p19

¹⁶ ibid

- 1883: First classroom built.
- 1892: Second classroom built.
- 1915: Third classroom built
- 1972: Old school closes
- 1977: Tenders let for demolition of old school
- 1987: Department of Conservation created and take responsibility for Reserve
- 2005: Kohukohu Conservation and Re-creation group gazetted to “control and manage”.
- 2007: Building reroofed.

11. Management Documentation

Draft Management Plan. 2005. Unpublished Report prepared by The Kohukohu Conservation and Re-Creation Society.

Old Kohukohu School Stability. 2005. Engineering Report prepared by Hawthorne Geddes (Ltd) 2005.

Business Case for Capital. Prepared by Alan Macrae. Internal DOC File HHA 01-01-14

Pearson. D, 2004. The Former Kohukohu School Hokianga Harbour Northland: A Condition Assessment.

DOC Management Files: HHA 01-01-14, 005-029.

12. Sources

Harrison, E. 1981 *Kohukohu 1881-1981. The District and the Schools.*

Harrison, E. 2007 *Kohukohu (Second Edition)* Tidal Publications.

Park, S. 2010. *Kohukohu School (Former), Iron railing Fence(Outside School), Kohukohu*, NZ Historic Places Trust .

Park, S, 2010 *World War One Memorial Gate, Kohukohu School, Kohukohu* N. Z. Historic Places Trust

13. Evaluation of Sources

Sources known to exist but not consulted

Files held by the Ministry of Education, Whangarei:

- BAZA 12c 1971 -1982
- BAZA 12d 1983-1989
- BAZA 261b 1971- 1989

BAZA 117d 1972-1989
BAZA 117e 1972 -1989
BAZA 93g 1934-1972
Archives New Zealand

BAZA 4433
BAZA 4434

Appendices to the Journals of the House of Representatives

atojs.natlib.govt.nz

Archives New Zealand

www.archway.archives.govt.nz

14. Appendices

Appendix A: Timeline of key events

- 1880:** Site for school purchased.
- 1883:** First classroom built.
- 1892:** Second classroom built.
- 1915:** Third classroom built.
- 1946:** A Dental Clinic was built at the school.
- 1959:** New playground constructed at rear of school.
- 1966:** School holds 85th Jubilee celebrations.
- 1985:** Gazetted as a “Historic Reserve.”
- 1985:** Kohukohu Historic and Arts Society gazetted to “control and manage.”
- 1987:** Department of Conservation created and begin management of reserve.
- 1997:** Kohukohu Historic and Arts Society pass management of the building to the North Hokianga Community Arts Council. This organisation did not have the appropriate legal standing to manage the building.
- 2001:** This arrangement remained in place until the error was discovered. Prolonged negotiations were conducted with this group but in the end they did not want to “control and manage” the building.
- 2002:** (Aug) the Kohukohu Fishing and Hunting Club offer to take over and care for the building on a ad hoc basis while negotiating with DoC. Neighbours objections and the fact that the clubs prime focus is fishing not the preservation of the building led the fishing club to find other premises.
- 2004:** A Condition Report is prepared by Dave Pearson Architects Ltd .
- 2004:** A dangerous concrete water tank is emptied and demolished; a new 22,000 litre tank is installed at the rear of the section and plumbed into the spouting and building water supply. A fitting was plumbed into the tank to enable the Kohukohu Fire Brigade to use the water tank for training and fire fighting.
- 2004:** (April) The North Hokianga Community Arts Council decline to be the body that “controls and manages” and suggests that the Kohukohu Conservation and Re-Creation Society would like to facilitate a community consultation process to find a group to control and manage the old school.
- 2004:** (Nov) A Public meeting is held in the Kohukohu Town Hall to discuss the future of the old school. Many interesting ideas come forward, but the conclusion of the meeting was that the community would like to meet again without DOC and discuss the matter further.
- 2004:** (Nov) Kohukohu Conservation and Re-Creation Society write to DOC to say that as a result of a meeting held on Nov 26th that they would like to apply to “control and manage” the building. They form a sub committee, the Old School Action Group (O.S.A.G.).
- 2005:** (Aug) DOC and O.S.A.G. agree to conditions for hand over of the Reserve.
- 2005:** (Aug) Receive report from Hawthorne Geddes regarding old school site stability.
- 2005:** (Sept) DOC submit a bid to the National Historic Pool for funding to re-roof the building.
- 2005:** (Sept) Kohukohu Conservation and Re-Creation Society are gazetted to “control and manage” the Kohukohu Historic Reserve.
- 2006:** The roof replacement bid is successful (\$12,600).
- 2007:** (June) Roof is replaced.

Appendix B: Detailed Fabric Description

The building consists of one large classroom (9.2m x 6.2m, 57.04sqm) and an annex (3.0m x 5.0m 15sqm) which contains a kitchen and a toilet. The stud height is approx 3m and a 45 degree pitch gable end roof runs length wise along the classroom. A secondary gable end roof covers the annex and intersects the main roof at right angles

Roof: The roof is sheathed in Colour Steel Maxx long run iron. The roof structure comprises of exposed under purlins fitted between simple bolted trusses. The purlins are overlaid with tongue, groove and reeded sarking running vertically.

Note : When the building was reroofed in 2007 the wooden barge flashings were replaced with galvanised iron flashings. This was done because of funding issues and the late discovery of the poor condition of the wooden flashings. It is intended to put wooden flashings back some time in the future. Details of these flashings can be found in the Kohukohu Historic Reserve File (HHA001-01-14) in the Kaitaia Area Office.

Walls: The walls are timber framed, sheathed on the outside with overlapping 225mm wide weatherboards. The interior walls are lined with tongue, grooved and reeded boards run horizontally.

Floor: The floor consists of tongue and grooved boards. These are fixed to sub floor framing comprising of 150 x 50mm joists and 100 x 75mm bearers on their flat fixed to 100 x 75mm jack studs. The jack studs generally rest on the original timber piles, likely to be Puriri. Some piles have been replaced with concrete blocks, particularly along the south east wall.

Joinery: The windows are generally 12 light double hung sashes. The small windows at high level in the gable ends are 4 light pivoting sashes. The door on the North West elevation is a four panel type as is the one between the former classroom and the annex. The tongue and groove sheathed door on the south east elevation has almost certainly been added or replaced an earlier door.

Trim: Barge Boards, fascias, soffits and corner boxes are made from timber. Decorative elements include finials and the moulded window facings. Other mouldings above the windows have been lost and the flagpole taken down. Internally moulded architraves have been provided to doors and windows. There is no skirting, although it appears that originally a moulded bead may have been fixed in the angle between the floors and walls. Note: For reasons unknown the skirting boards in the main class room had been removed (date of removal unknown also). This left a large drafty gap between the walls and floor. This was blocked by laying and screwing a piece 75 x 25mm timber on its flat in the corner and a piece of the same on its edge in the corner (2006).

APPENDIX C: Location maps

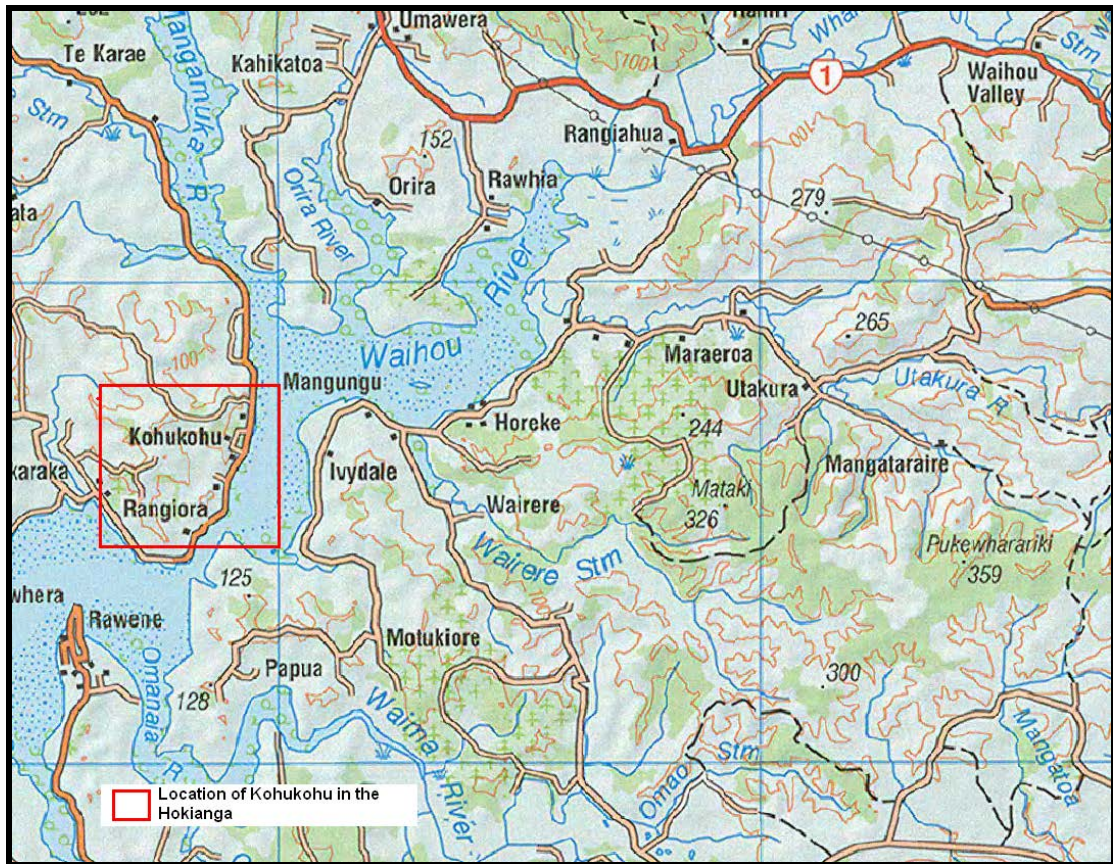
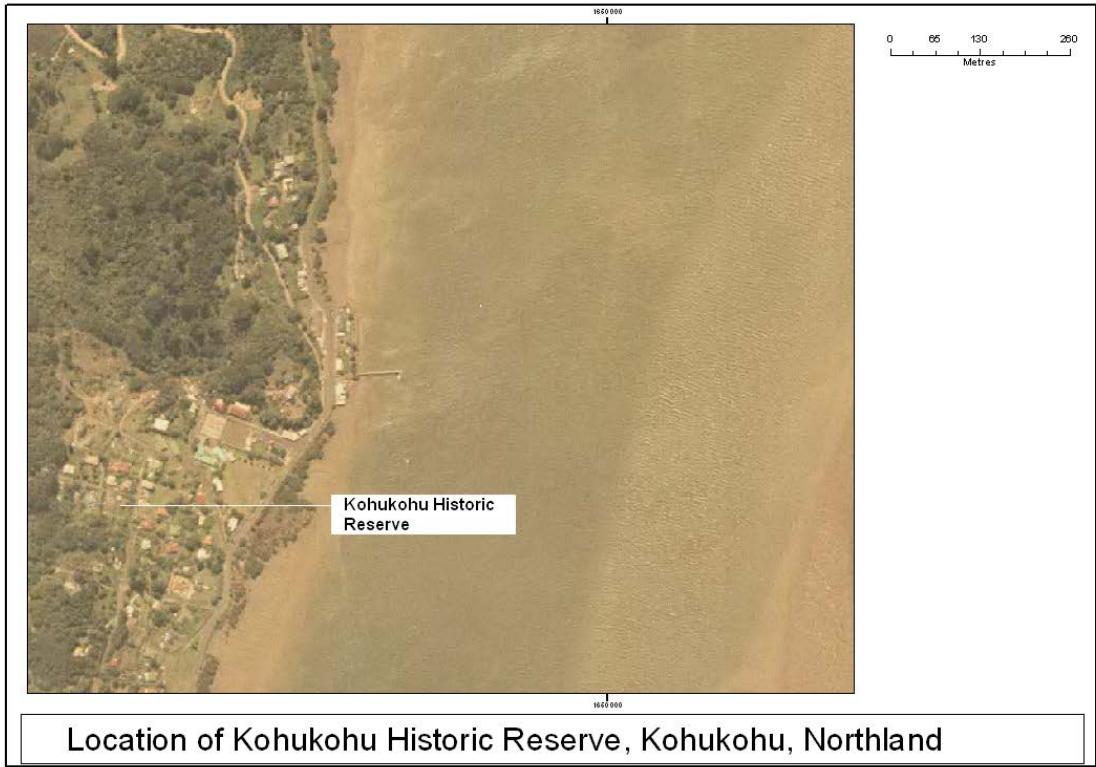


Figure C1: Location map showing Kohukohu's location in the Hokianga.



Location of Kohukohu Historic Reserve, Kohukohu, Northland

Figure C2: Location of Kohukohu Historic Reserve in Kohukohu.



■ Kohukohu Historic Reserve Street Location

Figure C3: Location of Historic Reserve.

APPENDIX D: Building plans



Figure D1: Copy of original drawings for first classroom built in 1883. Plans from Archive New Zealand (Archives reference YCBD A688 1650/d).