

‘I depend more on photographs to help me along’: The Ngāi Tahu portraits in *Lore and History of the South Island Maori*

Date: Monday 31 July 2017
Time: 11.00am – 12.00pm
Location: Room 208, Te Ao Marama Building
Presenter: **Helen Brown**

Abstract:

When *Lore and History of the South Island Māori* was published in 1952 it filled a vacuum in terms of accessible Ngāi Tahu history in the public domain. It remained one of the only readily available texts on Ngāi Tahu history for another thirty years before it was superseded by the collective works of a new generation of historians, both Pākehā and Ngāi Tahu. The book has never attracted academic attention, primarily because it is not scholarly. It has numerous errors, particularly in terms of traditional history, and a complete lack of referencing. For these reasons, it has been dismissed by the present generation of Ngāi Tahu historians and anyone seriously studying Ngāi Tahu history. However, despite its scholarly shortcomings the book has been extensively read, and for better or worse, continues to be regularly consulted (if not cited) by archaeologists, historians and students of Māori history. *Lore and History* was and is also a well-thumbed resource on the bookshelves in many Ngāi Tahu homes. A major element of the publication was its inclusion of twenty-two black and white plates comprising forty-one individual photographs, all taken by the author. Using the Ngāi Tahu portraits in *Lore and History* as a starting point, and informed where possible by oral interviews with their descendants, this presentation introduces some of the tribal members who were Taylor’s informants, friends and photographic subjects. Through a reading of the photographs it will briefly trace the trajectory of Taylor’s relationship with Ngāi Tahu and consider how the surfacing visual stories illuminate the text of *Lore and History* and Taylor’s wider body of work with the iwi in the first half of the twentieth century. While Taylor is best known as an amateur historian and ethnographer, his photographic practice was also fundamental to his ethnographic research. The photographic contracts that Taylor entered into with the Ngāi Tahu subjects of his photographs created an environment that facilitated exchange, rapport, empathy and frequently, enduring bonds.

Biography:

Helen Brown is a Senior Researcher in the Archives team at Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu.