

Thomas Hansen

New Zealand's First Permanent Non-Missionary Settler

Thomas Hansen, the son of Captain Thomas Hansen and wife Hannah, was born on 30th May 1785, and baptised on 19th June. Along with his parents and sister Hannah, he took passage on the *Duke of Portland* to start a new life in the colony of New South Wales. He was aged 22.

In 1814, he accompanied his family on the *Active* on its voyage to New Zealand to establish the first CMS mission station at Hohi. Arriving on 22nd December 1814, Thomas disembarked to become New Zealand's first permanent non-missionary settler. His sister Hannah and her husband John King became New Zealand's first permanent missionary settlers.

At first, Thomas shared an eighteen metres long by five metres wide raupo whare with the other three missionary families. The whare was divided into four rooms; one for each family. Thomas initially shared his space with his mother who had remained to assist in the birth of his sister's second baby. When the *Active* departed in February 1815, taking Mrs Hannah Hansen back to Sydney, Thomas remained to assist in the development of the mission buildings.

On 11th July 1815, the *Active* again departed the Bay of Islands after a period of nearly two months spent in gathering spars and flax to take back to Sydney. Thomas Hansen also returned to Sydney that year to look for a bride. A possible reason for this was the requirement of Rev Marsden that all the men at the mission should be married. Marsden was also concerned about the possible consequences should Thomas have a relationship with a Māori girl.

In Sydney, Thomas met Elizabeth Atkinson Tollis, daughter of Corporal Thomas Tollis and his de facto wife, Betty Atkinson, a transported convict. Thomas and Elizabeth were married on Christmas Day 1815 by Rev Samuel Marsden. Elizabeth was 16 years old and Thomas was 30. The couple returned to Hohi on the *Active* in February 1816 and moved back into the raupo whare where Hannah King had given birth to her son, Thomas Holloway King, on 21st February the previous year.

Thomas and Elizabeth Hansen's first child was born on 11th January 1817. Their daughter was named Hannah King Hansen after her maternal grandmother and her aunt. She was the second European girl to be born in New Zealand, having arrived 8 months after Dinah Hall. When Dinah left for Australia in 1822, Hannah became the oldest female child born in the settlement. Between 1817 and 1834, Thomas and Elizabeth were to have a total of 11 children, all of whom survived into adulthood.

Upon his return along with his new bride in 1816, Thomas Hansen set out to build his life in New Zealand. Initially he acquired a small 4 acre plot of land at Hohi, at the base of Rangihoua Pā. He later purchased a bigger acreage further west on the Te Puna side of the pā although he was only granted about half of his total claim in later years.

On 22nd March 1816, he was provided with timber so as to commence building a cottage across the Hohi Stream from the mission buildings. The stream would have been a good source of fresh drinking water all year round. The cottage would have been a simple two or three roomed building, made with pit sawn timber milled down by the beach. Thomas and Elizabeth moved into their cottage on 18th May 1816.

The site of the cottage is about 30 metres from the beach. It is now a parking area on the farm track leading down to Marsden Cross Reserve. In 1827, visiting artist, Augustus Earle, painted a picture of the Hohi mission station. Earle was at the eastern end of Rangihoua Bay, looking back towards the settlement and Rangihoua Pā. The Hansen cottage can be identified in the painting, at the base of the pā.

To earn his keep, Thomas worked for the missionaries, helping with building projects, bush and cattle work, and breaking in the land. Thomas later diversified to carpentering and bushwork. As a carpenter, Thomas' labour became very much in demand within the community.

The Reverend John Butler employed Thomas as a carpenter, along with other missionary carpenters and Māori sawyers, when building the Kerikeri mission station in 1821-1822. Butler's house was a weatherboard clad, two-storey Georgian design with a verandah and two chimneys. It was built primarily from kauri.

Used by other missionaries after Butler left in 1823, the house was occupied by CMS storekeeper and blacksmith James Kemp and his wife Charlotte when the adjacent Stone Store, now the oldest stone building in New Zealand, was built from 1832. The Kemps continued to live in the house after the mission station folded in 1848, operating a kauri gum business from the Stone Store. Over time, the house became known as Kemp House. The dwelling and gardens passed down through the family until it was gifted to the New Zealand Historic Places Trust in 1974.

Life was tough for these early settlers living at the Hohi mission station. Cooking would have been done on an open fire, and all fresh water would have to be brought up daily from the stream. As the mission station was designed to be self-sufficient, almost all of the food would have had to be produced at Hohi or grown by the Māori neighbours. In winter, when food supplies did run low, the families relied on supplies brought in by ship.

The Hansen children were not allowed to be educated with the Māori or missionary children because their father was a free settler. Some of the younger children received only enough schooling to enable them to sign their own names.

As his family increased, Thomas no doubt had to enlarge the cottage that he had built in 1816. Most likely, a lean-to was added to the side of the cottage to accommodate the growing number of children. Timber for the extensions would have been sawn at the sawyer's pit down by the beach.

Thomas also occasionally worked on ships, and provided a link between the ships' captains and local Māori, as the missionaries drew a line at dealing with people who might like the odd drink or two, or those who fraternised with Māori women. He sometimes traded with the Māori and whalers in guns and powder. Thomas was always interested in finding husbands for his six daughters and he kept up with who's who on the ships coming and going.

By 1832, the remaining two missionaries, John King and James Shepherd, were given permission to relocate to land purchased by the CMS at Te Puna. One of the boundaries was stated to be adjoining Mr Hansen's land so it seems likely that Thomas Hansen was the first one to buy land there, and the Hansen, King and Shepherd families probably shifted at the same time. Here, the land was much better suited to farming. In 1833, Shepherd departed for service at Kerikeri, leaving the two original families, Hansen and King, to reside at Te Puna for many more years.

Thomas, unlike the missionaries he worked for, did not grow rich by buying more land than he could use, but unlike the missionaries whose families seemed beset by illness and misfortune, his family flourished and grew and grew. In 1857, when Thomas applied to the Land Claims Commission, he described himself as *"a poor labouring man who has brought up his children with great credit to himself and unable to pay the Commission's fees."* At the time, he stated that he had 11 children and 32 grandchildren, 25 of whom were living with him at Te Puna.

Elizabeth Hansen died at Te Puna on 23rd March, 1867 aged 69 years. She was buried at Hohi. Some years later, Thomas moved across to Russell, the home of his daughter Amy Baker, who nursed him through his final illness. It was there that Thomas died on 8th March 1874, aged 89 years. At the time of his death, it was reported in the New Zealand Herald that he had 118 descendants.

According to his final wishes, Thomas was buried at Hohi alongside his wife and sister in the small cemetery overlooking Rangihoua Bay. It was here that brother and sister had landed 60 years earlier as part of the first European family to arrive as permanent settlers and start a new life in New Zealand.