

History of Moriori ancestral remains returning from the American Museum of Natural History

The 24 *kōimi tangata* (Moriori skeletal remains) returning home from the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) were donated or purchased from four different individuals and all but three can be linked back to the collector Henry Hammersly Travers.

Travers could be considered the most prolific in the collection and sale of Moriori karapuna (Moriori ancestral remains) in the world. Research has shown that Travers collected at least 75 skulls and skeletons from the Chatham Islands during three trips between 1863 and 1905/06. The vast majority were sold to, or deposited at, the Colonial Museum (Te Papa's predecessor) and many of these were then exchanged with other museums throughout the United Kingdom and Europe.

Travers also sold 11 skulls and 6 skeletons to J.F.G. Umlauff, who ran a natural history and artificial curiosities business based in Hamburg Germany. These, along with 64 other specimens from around the world, were purchased by the AMNH in June 1923. It is important to note that during this time period, under the Māori Antiquities Act 1904, permission had to be sought from the Colonial Secretary for the export of any Māori or Moriori antiquities. Research has shown that Travers did seek permission to export in June 1906, however this was declined by Colonial Secretary James Carroll. Travers sent them anyway. The single Moriori skull purchased by the AMNH in 1915 from Travers directly also did not have permission to leave New Zealand.

Three further Moriori skulls also found their way to Germany, most likely through the Colonial Museum or the Canterbury Museum, or both. These three skulls were part of the enormous collection of Felix von Luschan, a leading physical anthropologist, archaeologist, and explorer. He is also known for amassing one of the largest private collections of human remains in the world, with well over 5,000 'anthropological specimens' (in Europe anthropological specimens referred to human remains). Following von Luschan's death in 1924 the collection was purchased by Felix Warburg, a German born American banker and philanthropist from New York, and gifted to the AMNH. The remaining *Moriori karapuna* are attributed to a well-known New Zealand collector, the General Manager of the Department of Tourism and Health Resorts, Thomas Edward Donne; and Otto Buckler, for which there is little information.

The collecting of human remains from *Rēkohu* (Chatham Island) and *Rangihau* (Pitt Island) has had a long history. Colonial Museum records show that the earliest recorded donation of a 'Moriori skull' was the 19th-20th April 1866 by a Mr Lyon, less than a year after the museum opened. This skull was in fact the very first to be accessioned into the Colonial Museum's collections.

The 1860's was the beginning of large scale collecting on both *Rēkohu* and *Rangihau*, with many skulls and skeletons known as *kōimi tangata* (skeletal remains) or *karapuna* (ancestors), leaving their homeland destined not only for museums in New Zealand but throughout the world. The reason they left in such large numbers at this time, was due to the growing interest in Europe in the study of anatomy, and more specifically the so-called science of Phrenology and Craniometry. Darwin's theories on evolution had taken hold of the medical world, and the 'Savage' peoples of newly colonised countries were an important addition to these theories, especially those thought to be on the verge of extinction. Hence

why the Moriori in particular are by comparison, the most collected group within New Zealand.

For more information about the Moriori please refer to the Hokotehi Moriori Trust website at: <http://www.moriori.co.nz/home/>