

The Hansen Lemon Tree Project



Eric Hansen

Historical Background

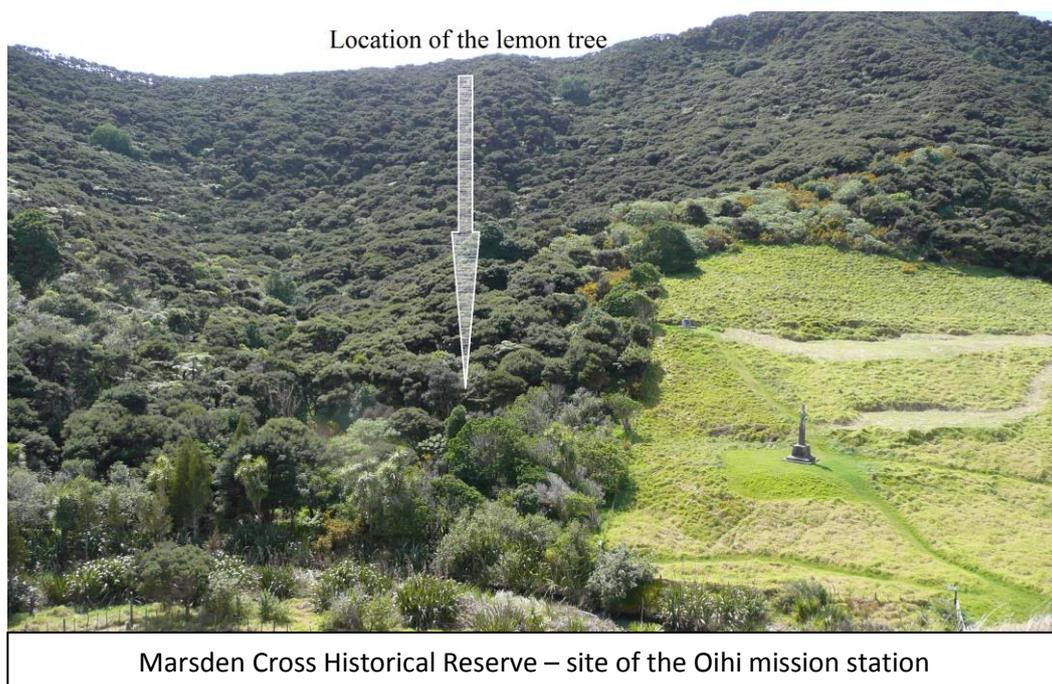
On December 22nd 1814, the brig *Active* anchored in Rangihoua Bay. On board were Rev Samuel Marsden and the three missionaries and their families who were to set up the first mission station in New Zealand. Living alongside the missionaries at Oihi was Thomas Hansen, New Zealand's first permanent non-missionary European settler. By 1816, Thomas Hansen and the three missionary families were living in cottages and had commenced farming the small piece of land that they were originally allocated by Ruatara, chief of the nearby fortified Rangihoua pa.

As an isolated settlement, thousands of kilometres from the nearest European settlement in New South Wales, the Oihi mission station had to be self-sufficient as much as possible. Landing with the first settlers were livestock, plants and seeds. A lemon tree would have most certainly been one of the first trees planted. Just as today, the lemon was used as a medicine, a cooking ingredient, and as a cleaning agent.

As recorded in *The Story of the New Zealand Mission* by Eugene Stock, Rev Samuel visited Oihi in 1819 and reported; *The 'arts of life' really seemed to be progressing. There were fields of wheat; there were horses and cattle; fruit-trees sent from Sydney were flourishing;*

In 1832, due to the unsuitability of the Rangihoua site for agriculture, the last of the original missionaries and the Hansen family relocated to neighbouring Te Puna, leaving no trace of human habitation except for some graves, the lemon tree and a briar rose.

In an article published in the *Evening Post* on 25th November 1899, mention is made of the lemon tree. Entitled *The Pilgrimage of a Tradition-Hunter* by Raina, the article reinforces the claim of the lemon tree to be New Zealand's oldest introduced tree. Raina was writing a series of articles about his travels around Northland, and visited Rangihoua. He wrote, *“On the shores above are the graves of the Mawsons (sic) and Kings, families left by Mr Marsden. Blame us not that we helped ourselves to lemons planted by these historic characters.”*



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In February of 2009, Eric Hansen, the great, great, great grandson of Thomas Hansen was at Rangihoua assisting with maintenance on the Hansen Memorial. While investigating the site of the original Hansen cottage, he discovered a very old lemon tree growing nearby.

According to Eric's parents, Kath and Stan Hansen, they had been shown the lemon tree 20 years earlier by the farm manager, Errol Hansen. At that time, it had suffered badly due to the possum and rat population ravishing the new shoots, and they were extremely doubtful it could survive. The tree's survival is no doubt a result of the recent DoC programme to reduce the pests in the reserve

Department of Conservation Bay of Islands area manager Rolien Elliot was "pretty certain" the lemon tree was the country's oldest, but the test to confirm its age would kill it.

Eric returned soon after with Lynda Bayer, a teaching colleague with a degree in horticulture, to inspect the tree and write a report on it. Lynda identified the lemon as a Lisbon type of lemon or an Australian Bush lemon.

As lemons were widely used in the 19th century for medicine, cooking and cleaning, Lynda agreed that the tree was most likely planted soon after the mission station was established. This would have predated by 4-5 years the pear tree that was planted in 1819 near the historic Stone Store in Kerikeri. This pear tree was previously thought to be the oldest living introduced tree.

A number of cuttings were taken and prepared for propagation by Mrs Bayer's horticulture class at Bream Bay College. Working in conjunction with John Thode of Bream Bay Landscapes Ltd, the cuttings were transferred to his hothouse at One Tree Point.

John Thode returned to Oihi the following year with Eric Hansen to take more cuttings, and to prepare a report to DOC on the state of the lemon tree. The additional cuttings have also been propagated so as to be available for family members attending the Hansen Family 200th Anniversary in 2014.

The trees that were grown by Bream Bay Landscapes were labelled the Hansen Lemon. This was in recognition of Thomas Hansen, New Zealand's first non-missionary settler, who had also arrived in 1814, and assisted in the development of the mission station. It also



Cuttings being propagated



Eric Hansen and John Thode taking cuttings from the lemon tree at Oihi

recognised that Eric Hansen had rediscovered the lemon tree, and that it was being propagated for the Hansen Family 200th Anniversary.

In January 2013, a request was made by Ted Hansen, Chairman of the Hansen Family 200th Anniversary Committee to the Historic Places Trust to have one of the first cuttings of the Hansen lemon tree planted in the grounds of Kemp House. As New Zealand's oldest house and the site of other fruit trees introduced by missionaries, it was felt that the grounds of Kemp House were an appropriate location to plant the lemon tree.

Kemp House also had a long established link with the Hansen family. The Reverend John Butler employed Thomas Hansen as a carpenter, along with other missionary carpenters and Māori sawyers, when building the Kerikeri mission station in 1821-1822.

On 19th May 2013, a special ceremony was held in the grounds of Kemp House to plant one of the first trees propagated from cuttings in 2009 by the Bream Bay College students. The tree was planted by Stan Hansen, the first Life Member of the 1814 Hansen Family Society Inc.



The propagated lemon tree ready to be planted