On 11 July 1863, a number of British soldiers went on the rampage, burning a local Maori village after chasing off its occupants. In retaliation two days later, Michael Meredith and his son became the first civilians to die in the conflict when they were killed on their Ramarama farm. On 17 July a party of troops escorting settlers along the Great South Road track, from the Queens Redoubt to Drury were ambushed by a party of 300 to 400 Maori. Five soldiers were killed and another five wounded. This action caused General Cameron to order the roadside bush on Great South Road to be cleared to prevent further ambush. On 22 July, a skirmish occurred at Kerikeri just outside Papakura and about the same time the two small sons of Devon man Ambrose Trust were killed at Whirford.

On 10 August a militia scouting party discovered a secret encampment of Kingite Maori in the Hunga Ranges and two days later the guns of HMS Avon bombarded the Meremere Pa. On 25 August, a party of soldiers and special constables working on the Great South Road at Bombay were attacked and their firearms stolen. Another skirmish occurred on 2 September at Pokeno and a few days later the British attacked Cameron Town. Next a party of soldiers was ambushed just north of Tuakau, resulting in the award of two Victoria Crosses and six Distinguished Conduct Medals to men of the 65th (Yorkshire) Regiment of Foot. At 9.30 am on 14 September some 200 Maori warriors attacked St Brides Church in Pukekohe East where a party of ten special constables were building a stockade. Fighting continued until 4.00 pm and ended when a rescue party of British troops arrived. None of the original defenders were injured, but three British troops were killed and another seven wounded. The following day six Maori were buried in the churchyard and estimates indicated some forty additional Maori were killed, or died from wounds received in that attack. That same day twenty warriors attacked Burts Farm, just three miles from St. Brides, resulting in two European deaths.

On 15 September another skirmish occurred at Wairoa South near Clevedon and two days later a detachment of police and militia from the Galloway redoubt near Clevedon, were led off in pursuit of the attackers. On 23 October two militia officers were killed with six of their men between Mauku and Drury then, on 21 November the Meremere Pa was finally taken. Thereafter the war zone steadily moved south, leaving the district in a state of uneasy peace. With the departure of the military and ongoing problems with unruly groups passing through Papakura, the role of the civilian police began to gain importance in the community.

Meanwhile the first recorded mention of civilian police based in Papakura is found in the journal of the Appointments and Proceedings of the Auckland Provincial Council, session 15 dated 19 March 1863, on page 69. It simply states, “Police rent at Otahuhu, Papakura and Maunganui.” The following year a reference is again made to “Police rents at Papakura.” Unfortunately no other information is known to exist.

With the specific task of maintaining peace in the “Liberated” areas, fifty man companies of Armed Constabulary were positioned at chosen locations, with three of these based at Papakura. The Provincial Gazette dated Thursday 12 October 1865, states, “Accepted tender for a Papakura police station by Scurrah and Peak of Otahuhu, for 185 pounds.” Records for the following year indicate the building had been completed at the agreed price. It was in fact the town’s first lock up.

In 1867, records show funding for horse hire had been provided for the Papakura constable. Control of finances for the supply and care of horses used by Police were to remain strictly enforced, even into the twentieth Century. If an animal ate too much feed, the excess had to be paid for out of the constable’s own pocket. In addition, upon joining the force men were issued with equipment that was listed on an official schedule and signed by both the constable and his superior officer. Each man was then required to attend regular pay parades at which he had to produce this document before receiving his money. If he could not produce the list, he had to produce every single item of equipment recorded on it. The cost of any missing, damaged or worn out items was then deducted from the pay handed out.

Inspector Thomas Brohami’s annual report of the Armed Constabulary dated 3 June 1874 states: “The government possesses a suitable site at Papakura for the erection of a station, upon which a lock up has already been built, but the constable resides in a cottage rented by the government at eight shillings per week, which is situated about a quarter of a mile away from the lock up, a most inconvenient distance. A station should be built as soon as possible.” In police terms this separation was considered unsuitable, especially when prisoners were incarcerated and a constant watch had to be maintained, not only on the prisoner but also to prevent his release by associates.

Perhaps in an attempt to gain support for his proposal to build a new police station at a cost of two hundred pounds the following year, the distance had grown somewhat as the Commissioners report read, “From the first, the constable has resided in a rented cottage a half a mile from the lock up.” At the same time estimates were submitted for a full time mounted constable there, but by 1877 the records still indicated a single constable patrolling the area on foot. Plans drawn up in 1939 clearly show a lock up and a small police office existed on the site.

Inspector Thomas Broham continued to head the new force and in a report dated 5 June 1878, he states, “The sum of forty pounds has been added (to the estimate) for the forage of a horse for the constable at Papakura. During the last year, the cost of horse hire for the constable averaged from three pounds ten shillings, to four pounds per month, which would more than cover the expense of
keeping one and, with the disadvantage of compelling the constable to search for a horse — often getting one only as a compliment, instead of being able to turn out at once in an emergency."

He concluded, “The Papakura district is large, probably forty miles by twenty; settlement is becoming extended in it; year by year the want of a horse for police purposes becomes greater and it much more economical and effectual that a horse should be foraged at the expense of the Department.”

A New Zealand Herald article dated 20 July 1878 stated – The Bench of Magistrates appointed to administer the Slaughter-house Act in the Manukau County met at the Papakura, R.M. Courthouse on Saturday. The by-laws as published in the Weekly News of the 20th June, indicated the appointment amongst others of Constable McKnight as a District Inspector with from 11 November 1878.

**ABOVE:** The first official Papakura police station built in 1865 in Wood Street, half a mile from the residence.

The following year came the first indication that there were two Constables at Papakura when an Auckland Star article dated 31 October 1879 stated - Between 3 and 4 o'clock yesterday afternoon, information was received at the Papakura Police Station to the effect that a man apparently insane was causing much alarm among the settlers of Drury by his strange manners and gesticulations. Constable McKnight immediately saddled his horse and proceeded to the district where he discovered the man whose name was Robert Glover, an escaped lunatic. He (McKnight) with the assistance of Constable Walker secured the unfortunate man and placed him in a cart intending to take him back to the asylum, being too late for the train to Auckland.

McKnight in shirt sleeves on the left and Constable Walker at right

They started from Drury about 7 o'clock and on reaching a dangerous culvert, close by a place known as ‘Chisholm Bush’ the horse shied at something and the cart was completely capsize, killing the poor lunatic on the spot and injuring one of the constables (McKnight) severely. Walker at once cut the traces allowing the horse to get free and, on removing the cart from the body of Glover, feared that life was extinct as it was perfectly motionless. Dr. Haines from Auckland was sent for and reaching the place as speedily as possible and, having made an examination expressed his belief that death was instantaneous.

Unfortunately no other details are known of the Constable Walker mentioned in this and other articles. There were known to be two men of this name working in the Auckland district at this time, but there is no indication which one it refers to.

Meanwhile in 1879 McKnight became a full time Constable, earning the princely sum of seven and sixpence per diem, or 136 pounds 17 shillings per year. But by 1887 the records still indicated a single constable based here. The reason for this can be explained in the way the police kept their records at this time. Papakura, along with many other police stations, was located in the Auckland Police District and when a man was sent there his record was endorsed only as working at Auckland. Local records may well have unlocked the secret of their identities, but mass destruction of valuable and historic police records in 1968 closed that avenue of enquiry forever.

During the 1800s the area grew steadily, the population being boosted by an influx of thousands of gum diggers of all nationalities in search of Kauri gum discovered in the dried out flat lands to the south and east. Referring to the 1890s, A.E. Tonson quotes in his book, “Old Manukau,” “…at Papakura and when the gum diggers came to town on Saturday evenings, things were always sufficiently lively for up to six policemen to be kept on duty, for it was also the late shopping night.”

Two New Zealand Herald newspaper items dated 28 and 29 May 1883 provided a stark picture of routine police life and illustrates the kind of man Andrew McKnight really was.

“Charles Adams the prisoner who escaped so cleverly from the Auckland lock up early on Thursday has been just as cleverly recaptured by Mounted Constable McKnight of Papakura who soon ran him to earth.

Immediately the escape was reported to Superintendent Thomson, who took steps which ended in the prompt recapture of the offender. All of the constables in the outer districts were at once warned and furnished with a description of the offender. Mounted Constable Kelly, the detectives and some plain clothes men were engaged in tracing the route taken by Adams. The acting lock up keeper, Constable Macky was also released from ordinary duty to enable him to devote his whole time to the work of recapture and he left no stone unturned to track down the fugitive.

The first clue obtained of the direction taken by Adams in the

An enlarged portion of the photograph of Great South Rd shows the rented Papakura police residence with Constable Andrew
outset and the means he intended using for securing his flight to country districts south of Auckland, was got on Saturday morning. A horse was reported missing or stolen on Friday night by one Remuera settler and another gave information that his saddle and bridle had disappeared. The theory come to by police authorities was that Adams had made for the Orakei scrub and taken shelter there on Thursday, appropriated the horse and equipments on Friday night and would probably make his way up Great South Road. Constable McKnight was on the lookout and succeeded in arresting Adams at the Bombay settlement on Saturday night, although he was not secured without a desperate struggle.

It appears that Constable McKnight of Papakura got trace of Adams early on Saturday near Papakura and tracked him from house to house until he reached the Bombay settlement. Here Adams had applied for shelter as a wayfarer at a house in which there were only two women at the time. The constable, on coming to the house at once closed with Adams, who is a strapping muscular fellow and endeavoured to affect his arrest. A free fight ensued between the two men. The women screamed and a Newfoundland dog in the house joined in the melee, but being puzzled as to the rights and wrongs in the row, he alternately bit both parties.

After nearly and hour’s struggle a settler came to the constable’s assistance and he succeed in getting the handcuffs on Adams. Constable McKnight’s hands are badly bitten and mauled and Adams’ wrists are also swollen and contused with his desperate efforts to free himself from the handcuffs. The constable also recovered the horse, saddle and bridle which had been stolen. Among Adams’ effects was found a pistol, but although known to the police as a petty larcenist, there is no reason to believe Adams intended to take to the road.

Detective Hughes goes up by the early Waikato train today to take charge of the prisoner and bring him down to Auckland by the evening train as Constable McKnight has to look after the horse etc. It must be a source of satisfaction to find that Superintendent Thomson’s cast of the net had been so successful and the recapture effected so promptly.”

A follow up by the Thames Star on 30 May 1883 indicated: “Charles Adams who made his escape from the Auckland police station and was recaptured by Constable McKnight, was brought up yesterday morning on a charge of stealing a carpet-bag and its contents, value 80 shillings, on the 22nd Instant, the property of John Thompson of Auckland. Sergeant White said the prisoner had given a great deal of trouble to the police and, as other charges would be brought against the prisoner, asked that the case be remanded. Remanded for 8 days.”

Another aspect of policing was illustrated in the New Zealand Herald on 1 September 1884 when: “A man named Gibson was brought into town on Saturday by Constable Mc Knight of Papakura, who had been sentenced to two months imprisonment for breach of the Destitute Persons Relief Ordinance, by neglecting to maintain his wife and family. He had been arrested at Gisborne and remanded to Papakura where his family resided, to be dealt with.”

A major turning point in the life of Andrew Thomas McKnight occurred in August 1892. Frederick Plummer was a notorious burglar and thief who had spent a third of his life in prison for larceny of varying degrees and become infamous for a number of daring prison escapes. Arriving in New Zealand from London in 1860, Plummer very soon lapsed into a life of crime and subsequent terms of imprisonment. In 1867 he rented a house in Great North Road, Auckland and following another arrest it was found to be full of his booty, including the wigs and gowns worn by the judge and barristers involved in one of his earlier convictions. His crimes were spread through the length and breadth of the country and on one escape from prison he was only recaptured after being shot in the leg.

Claiming to have repented and put a life of crime behind him he married and moved with his new bride to Papakura. On the 16th of August 1892, Plummer’s Uncle, Mr. C. Plummer, reported the theft of a double barrelled fowling piece, a bag of shot, a flask of powder and a number of cartridges to Constable McKnight of Papakura. He stated that some months earlier during the apple season he had employed his Nephew Fred Plummer at his Woodstock property near Hunua, but had sent him away due to his misconduct. Fred Plummer became the suspect of the theft after a witness, Mr. W. Shepherd who now ran the Woodstock property, stated he had seen Fred Plummer lighting a fire in some scrub a quarter mile from the farmhouse on the 15th. He returned to the house and a search by him and his sister identified the items as missing.

Constable McKnight and Shepherd immediately went to Hunua in search of Plummer, who was nowhere to be found, but the cooking fire he had lit was still burning and scraps of food were also found.
They continued their search through into the 17th August without success. That night the Woodstock property was again burgled and a quantity of foodstuff was stolen along with an axe, a pair of boots, a saucepan and a bucket. These were taken to a nearby empty cottage previously used by Plummer when working on the property, a fire was lit and some potatoes boiled. The theft was discovered the next day and also reported by Shepherd to Constable McKnight.

The search was recommenced again on the 18th without result and McKnight, being convinced that Plummer had left the area, sent messages to the Mercer and Pukekohe police asking them to watch the roads. However later that day the constable and Shepherd found fresh tracks in dense bush near the Hunua railway station. At 3 o’clock they prepared to search an empty house on Hunua Road where they could see a drainage ditch about 3 feet deep and from where a weapon had been fired and went in that direction but had in fact been fired by Shepherd who was armed with a revolver to intimidate him. When the constable reached the clearing he heard another noise as he had once been, was carrying a loaded revolver and called out, “If you do not stop I will fire at you.” Plummer kept running.

Shepherd and the constable split up and McKnight, following Plummer towards the railway clearing, fired one shot over his head to intimidate him. When the constable reached the clearing he heard a gunshot which he assumed had been fired by the fugitive, but had in fact been fired by Shepherd who was armed with a carbine. Still chasing Plummer the two pursuers met up again, but remained some distance apart and heard another shot coming from the direction of the road. They turned and could see gun smoke from where a weapon had been fired and went in that direction where they could see a drainage ditch about 3 feet deep and suspected Plummer was hiding in it.

Shepherd asked McKnight if he should fire, but the constable told him not to. Shepherd then called out that he had heard a noise coming from the drain and was again told not to shoot. The constable then also heard a noise similar to groaning just as Shepherd called out that he was going towards a gate and for the constable to make sure Plummer didn’t run for it. McKnight called for Plummer to give himself up and when he did not he aimed his pistol about 15 yards to the right of where he had heard the last noise come from and in the direction that Plummer seemed to be moving, then fired.

After several more calls to surrender were ignored and no more noise was heard they moved in for a closer search and were astonished to find Plummer dead in the drain with a gunshot wound to the temple. Near his body were found several of the items stolen in the earlier burglaries. The gun was not located. Plummer’s body was taken to the empty cottage he had once occupied then a doctor called and messages advising of the incident sent to the Auckland police. It was clear that Plummer had been killed by Constable McKnight’s gun shot.

Unfortunately as was the system in those days, Constable McKnight was not only the Papakura constable, but also clerk of the court, court orderly, bailiff, probation officer and gaoler among other roles. As a consequence it was his responsibility to empanel a jury for Plummer’s Coronary hearing, which found after hearing all the available evidence that Constable McKnight had not acted improperly.

This combination of events and his perceived complicity in rigging the Coroner’s Court resulted in outrage by the press, creating a public furore. He was accused of being judge, jury and executioner by many to the point that he was hounded by protesters wherever he went. For his safety McKnight was transferred to Auckland in 1894 and his place at Papakura was taken by Ponsonby’s Constable George Foreman.

By 1895 McKnight’s marriage had broken up and he had left the police and returned to farming under the assumed name of John Mitchell on the freehold piece of land in the Waikato that he had owned prior to joining the police. However his true identity remained well known to most people and he soon became bankrupt, apparently leading a miserable and destitute life from this time until his death on 3 October 1912 at the age of 75 years.

One of McKnight’s four Daughters later married a man named Timothy Pacard Christian, a descendant of Pitcairn Island’s Fletcher Christian of Mutiny on the Bounty fame. In 1903 he was convicted of a brutal sex attack on a 6 to 10 year old girl and sentenced to 10 years hard labour. Fresh out of prison in 1912 he was again facing an indecent assault charge but the result of that is not known.

Prepared with the assistance of research conducted by Kara Oosterman of Papakura.