




# **A window into Māori history in Antarctica**

- Polar history has a habit of centering white men in positions of power
- despite its isolation from humanity, discussions around racism and colonialism in Antarctica are relevant
  - this poster wants to provide a look into Māori history in Antarctica by

examining the lives and  
times of some notable individuals

- there a lot of Māori/  
Polynesian oral history about ships that made it to Antarctica, however it is beyond the scope of this presentation

# Te Atu



- seaman on the United States Exploring Expedition(1838-42), signed on as John Sac, left expedition O'ahu

- possibly son of legendary sealer & whaler William Stewart (namesake of Stewart Island/Rak-

iura) and/or Māori nobility

- sighting of the Antarctic Continent in early 1838, but no new furthest south
- big source on the expedition is the multi-volume narrative written by leader, Charles Wilkes
- Wilkes uses expedition narrative to defend violent

actions of the expedition,  
(burning of Indigenous vil-  
lages villages and crops,  
disproportionate killings),  
often relying on dehumanis-  
ing stereotypes

- Te Atu is often the inter-  
preter preceding these con-  
flicts
- while Wilkes has a lot of  
praise for “Tuatti”, it is  
mostly in a patronising oth-

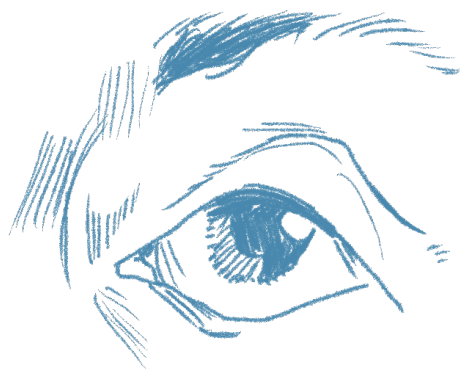
ering tone, possibly projecting a noble savage stereotype

- Wilkes is only primary source on Te Atu life beside Navy records
- notes that Te Atu wants to buy an island, historically belonging to his fathers family in Aotearoa b.c. of English encroachment(=father not Stewart afterall?)

# **Dr Louis Hauiti Potka**

- born (1901) in Utiku to son of tribal leader and namesake of home village, Utiku Potaka, who like Tuati wanted to protect land from settlers) and daughter of Jewish shopkeepers
- studied medicine and became 5th Māori medical graduate ever

- recruited as a replacement doctor for the Second Byrd Antarctic expedition (1933-5, with Byrd being explicitly asked whether Potaka being Māori was an issue
- got along well on the ex-





pedition, possibly performing the first appendectomy in Antarctica and a lot of dentistry

- getting snowblinded while hunting caused lasting pain & damage
- generally beloved by the communities he served, but often came into conflict with people in authority, often being the only Māori

person in those spaces

- he committed suicide after a long administrative conflict with the local health board. His funeral was the biggest Tātaka had seen until that point

## **Randal Heke**

- born 1928 in Whangarei, passed away 2024

- grew up in Orphanages and Native Schools, started working as a builder from 14
- Māori identity rarely acknowledged by sources
- Chief Building Superintendent overseeing construction of Scott Base in 1956 preceeding Commonwealth Trans Antarctic Expedition of 1957

- Scott Base instrumental to NZ colonial presence in Antarctica

- buildings were prefab and took seven weeks for a crew of seven to construct

- at first, while huts were being constructed, team slept in al-



## pine tents

- helped build more buildings in Antarctica up until 1960 and was involved with conservation of Scott base
- dedicated Antarctic for all his life, member of several regional branches of New Zealand Antarctic Society and became president in the 1970s

# Conclusion

- biographies reflect racist practices part of “exploration”
- despite this polar history existing, Māori participation in Antarctic research is affected by systemic racism w. re. to access to education, programmes etc.