



Ronald Vine: Views on Education. Part One: 1934-1939

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MIKE VINE

Harry Ronald Vine was a journalist and photographer for 40-odd years from 1934. His parents were Native School Teachers and until he was 13 years old Ron – as he was known to all his friends – lived exclusively in the Maori communities of Te Hapua in the Far North and Ruatoki in the Bay of Plenty where he received his schooling. His last two years of schooling were at Wanganui Technical College. Although primarily an agricultural journalist Ron's early articles reflected his wide-ranging interests which included education. This two-part article is based on his published work, with Part One concentrating on his observations of Maori schooling. Part Two will cover general agricultural education in New Zealand schools. [see Volume 7, Issue 2]

In 1934 a short article on cypress trees, along with a photo, appeared in *The New Zealand Farmer* under the by-line Tyntax.¹ Tyntax was Ronald Vine, and the article marked the start of a 42 year career of agricultural journalism and photography that ended with his retirement as editor of the magazine in 1975.

Apart from his five years as editor, Ron always freelanced, and being determined from the beginning to live solely on his writing, he had to supplement his agricultural writing with other articles as *The Farmer* was then published only monthly. So for the early years, especially the eight until his war service, he travelled around the North Island with his typewriter and photography equipment – firstly with a motorbike and sidecar, then a Baby Austen, and from 1936 a caravan which doubled as his darkroom – writing not just about pigs and pasture, but also about anything that interested him and which would sell. And his interests were very wide, from the Ringatu faith to roads, pottery to lawn care, gardens to shipwrecks, houses to landscapes, redoubts, gold mining, gum digging, Maori schools and agricultural education. His interest in these last two subjects sprang from his upbringing.

Ron's parents, Henry and Winifred, were Native School teachers from 1909 until 1929. When Ron was born in 1914 they were at Te Hapua in the Far North. Te Hapua was an isolated community even for that time, being connected to Auckland by a 4-day steamer service that ran fortnightly (and only monthly during the War); thus his Pakeha contacts outside his family were confined to the once-yearly Christmas trip to Port Albert where his grandmother lived. When he was eight his parents transferred to Ruatoki in the Bay of Plenty where, although access was easier, the locals identified very strongly with their Maoritanga and resisted the 'civilising' mandate Native School Teachers were required to undertake. When Ron graduated aged 13 from his father's standard

¹ 'Tyntax' [HR Vine]: The cypress trio. *The New Zealand Farmer*, 1 June, 1934

six class he was sent for two years to Wanganui Technical College, where he found the city-bred white boys a 'strange race'.² It was thus natural that when collecting stories he gravitated towards agricultural education and, especially in the early days, Maori agricultural education.

The contemporary thinking was that civilisation came with the Pakeha and that the best solution for Maori unemployment was practical education and farming. It was a view held by Ron at the beginning of his writing – although he quickly resiled from it, especially the civilization part – and one that was espoused by his father and other teachers. The minutes of the 1922 Conference of the Native School Teachers' Association recorded that Henry (then the Association's secretary) '... urged the teaching of agriculture to the boys and housework to the girls; he believed in educating the Maori in more practical matters of life, rather than as intellectual people';³ although, not to be second-rate citizens:

... we must seriously consider the object to be attained in giving [Maori] an education at all. Is it for turning out an inferior Pakeha? Or do we wish to turn out a first rate Maori, able and willing to take his place alongside of our own race? If the latter, it seems to us to be necessary not only to give him a thorough grounding in the ordinary English subjects ... but to show him the dignity of labour.⁴

The dignity of labour was the focus of a 1937 article by Ron about St Stephen's School farm.⁵ It was the view of WC Morris (principal of the school who was also not keen on examinations) that: 'Our aim is to prepare the boys for a life on the land; to train them to be useful members of the community; to instil in them the will to work; to teach them the dignity of honest toil'. This training was to enable the boys to become farmers in their own right and to develop their initiative. They milked and cared for the school's 40 shorthorns, shored its 700 sheep and managed pastures and crops. Ron wrote:

Should they pass from the college to management of their own holdings, a system of simple servitude (into which this industrial training could develop) is particularly eschewed, and at the outset of any particular job or duty, they are not merely told what must be done, but first asked what they intend to do and how they intend to do it.⁶

At the time the Government was pouring huge amounts of money into developing general and Crown land, and there was a parallel scheme, the initiative of [later Sir] Apirana Ngata, for Maori land development. Ron was hugely supportive of 'The Scheme' as it was known, and wrote several articles about its impacts, including on his old stamping ground Ruatoki where, for example, pig farming was taught to the primary school children so that they could then show their adults:

² HR Vine: Te Hapua with love. Unpublished memoir (draft)

³ *Te Waka Maori*, April, 1922 [*Te Waka Maori* was the journal of the Native School Teachers' Association which Henry Vine published, printed, edited and mostly wrote.]

⁴ *Te Waka Maori*, 1 November, 1919

⁵ HR Vine: The dignity of honest toil. *The New Zealand Farmer*, 21 July, 1937

⁶ *ibid.*

Pig raising by native school children has been tried at several of the native 'scheme' districts, and at Ruatoki the idea has proved exceptionally successful. There are two large native schools there ... At the school on the western side the children have a model piggery which might serve as an example for the most particular of farmers, Maori or Pakeha. The children are taught not only the principles of pig rearing but also the construction of the piggery itself ... When a Maori farmer is contemplating pig rearing, and is seeking advice on a layout ... the children are able to explain to him how it is done.⁷

A rather more sophisticated venture was underway at the Horohoro Native School, just south of Rotorua, also involving primary-aged children.⁸ There, by combining two acres of school grounds, two acres from a recreation reserve and another two donated by a neighbour, a 'thriving and profitable, if small,⁹ dairy farm and piggery' was established. With the help of neighbouring farmers, the boys – who would not have been older than 13 or 14 – cleared the land, established the pasture and built up the herd with donated cows.



Figure 1. Pupils ringing a pig. Horohoro Native School farm, 1940.

[Photo: Ron Vine]

⁷ HR Vine: Pigs at Ruatoki. *The New Zealand Farmer*, 7 December, 1939. At the time, pig farming was a necessary adjunct to dairying as farmers sold only their cream, and pigs were fed the skim milk.

⁸ HR Vine: Self-reliance through agriculture. *The New Zealand Farmer*, 8 August, 1940

⁹ 6 acres = 2.4 ha



Figure 2. Pupils broadcasting fertiliser. Horohoro Native School farm, 1940.
[Photo: Ron Vine]

The article added that:

A boy whose father has given a cow is reckoned the owner of the cow, in consideration of which he receives a regular sum from the farm revenue in addition to the 'wage' he receives along with the other 'workers' of the farm. A similar amount is paid to Mr Osborne [the headmaster] for each of the cows for which the farm is indebted to him, and in this way the whole price of the cows will be paid off.¹⁰

¹⁰ HR Vine: Self-reliance through agriculture. *The New Zealand Farmer*, 8 August, 1940

The administration and secretarial work of the farm was also attended to by the pupils:

Monthly meetings are held in which farm managers are elected, motions concerning farm management are duly moved, seconded and carried, accounts¹¹ and reports are read and approved, and minutes are recorded. Two farm managers are elected for each month, and it is their duty to detail the 'workers' off to the various jobs needing attention and to appoint morning and evening milkers and separator washers ... Although the farm managers are responsible for the proper carrying out of the jobs in hand, they may only act on the recommendation of the council meeting.¹²

The Horohoro Native School farm was well-run and the profits from the six cows, the pedigree boar and sow went to the pupils themselves. But the teaching of farming was not the chief benefit, although farming techniques were undoubtedly learnt. The real objective, as the headmaster pointed out, was

to develop, not six acres of grass and so many pedigree pigs, but those invaluable faculties – such as initiative and the ability to form sound and prompt judgements and the confidence to act upon them – which modern competitive life is making increasingly necessary in the Maori's make-up.

'That there is no dearth of these faculties latent in the Maori pupils' minds', Ron wrote, 'is proved by such facts as this, that all the meetings ... are held without the need for any supervision – indeed, usually without even the presence of Mr Osborne himself'.

It is possible in his writing of this time to discern Ron's growing concern about the undercurrent of Maori denigration, a concern which he would give voice to after the war. In the 1950s and 1960s he published articles demonstrating the ability of Maori to farm their land if they were given the chance, and wrote editorials deploring the murmurings of the nation that Maori should have their land confiscated if they did not farm it 'properly'.

But while Ron supported all efforts at developing Maori land, he came to realise that something else was missing. When he was at school things Maori, including their art, were actively suppressed. The duties of Native School Teachers, like his parents Henry and Winifred, included teaching 'the children to grow up as like as possible to Pakehas'.¹³

It would be difficult to imagine anything more hopeless – indeed, more tragic – than the prospect Maori youth faced even so recently as ten years ago. If the chance of some future avenue for talent, the incentive for some reasonable pride in one's race and kind, is the just inheritance of youth, the Maori boys and girls turned their faces toward a void as blank and hopeless as a brick wall.¹⁴

¹¹ Reflecting the social mores of the time, the bookkeeping was done by a girl student.

¹² HR Vine: Self-reliance through agriculture. *The New Zealand Farmer*, 8 August, 1940

¹³ HR Vine: Renaissance of Maori crafts. *The Weekly News*, 27 December, 1939

¹⁴ *ibid.*

This reference to ten years was to the change in official policy in the early 1930s from 'assimilation' to 'cultural adaptation' and encouraging the introduction of Maori arts and crafts (but not language) into Native Schools,¹⁵ even though the arts and crafts were treated more as subjects to be taught than as expressions of cultural identity.



Figure 3. Pupils with whai (string figures). Kaikohe Native School, 1939/40.

[Photo: Ron Vine]

When Ron was at school he never saw any carving being done, but by the late 1930s he noted that Te Teko School in the Bay of Plenty had a fine carved entrance and even the plain post that used to hold the rain gauge at his old school in Ruatoki had been replaced by a carved totara post. Visiting his old school he watched boys carving (and speaking te Reo) and an old school mate learning weaving patterns from her aged mother and aunt.¹⁶

¹⁵ Judith Simon (ed): *Nga Kura Maori*, p. xv. Auckland University Press, 1998

¹⁶ HR Vine: *Te Hapua with love*. Unpublished memoir



Figure 4. Boys carving in Ron's father's old schoolroom. Ruatoki Native School.
Date uncertain but probably 1940, 1941 or 1946.

[Photo: Ron Vine]

At Kaikohe, then the country's biggest native school, Ron watched the enthusiasm with which the pupils took part in lessons, contrasting it with his time at school when 'mental concentration on a lesson usually only existed under pain of a teacher's watchful presence'.¹⁷

¹⁷ HR Vine: Their great adventure. *The Weekly News*, 20 March, 1940

Now, children voluntarily taught each other and learnt history and geography from the daily newspaper, and in the infant room he watched a small boy

... standing on a chair before the blackboard pointing with a ruler to each word of a lesson written there, while a group of equally small infants surrounded him repeating the words aloud.¹⁸



Figure 5. A small boy standing on a chair before the blackboard.
Kaikohe Native School, 1939/40.

[Photo: Ron Vine]

¹⁸ HR Vine: Their great adventure. *The Weekly News*, 20 March, 1940

A little later, the same small boy was standing on a chair beating time to an infant percussion band.



Figure 6. The same small boy standing on a chair beating time to an infant percussion band. Kaikohe Native School, 1939/40.

[Photo: Ron Vine]

Ron was enthusiastic, seeing in these ‘most remarkable changes ... a wonderful ability in these children to express themselves, both orally and physically’, and he paralleled this cultural revival with Ngata’s scheme for the development of ‘previously barren’ Maori land:

This [Scheme] was a dawn of hope for the Maori race, but it is only the starting point of the great change which I saw when I revisited the biggest native school in New Zealand [Kaikohe]. I saw the renaissance of the Maori race shown in a more subtle way than the eagerness with which the generation growing up grasp this new opportunity to turn their hands to the soil that is ancestrally theirs.¹⁹

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¹⁹ HR Vine: Renaissance of Maori crafts. *The Weekly News*, 27 December, 1939

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

MIKE VINE



Mike Vine, son of Ron Vine, was born in Auckland and schooled at Warkworth District High School and Mahurangi College, and in 1972 gained a BSc in forestry from the University of Wales. He has worked for the Forest Research Institute in Rotorua and later for the Water and Soil Division of the Ministry of Works and Development in Palmerston North assessing plants for erosion control.

During the 1980s he was Senior Soil Conservator for the Hauraki Catchment Board in Te Aroha before moving to the Bay of Plenty as a planner for the Bay of Plenty Regional Council and the Rotorua District Council, working on policies for water and soil management and pest control.

Now retired in Raglan, he is writing – at glacial speed – a biography of his father. He is married with two adult children and is an ordained Anglican priest.