



(Foster, 2009a)



Te WHEROWHERO, Mahuta Tawhiao Potatau

(c. 1855–1912).

Third Maori “King”.

Mahuta Te Wherowhero was born about 1855 at Whatiwhatihoe, near Pirongia Mountain. He was the second son of Tawhiao and his first wife, Hera. On 14 September 1894 the *Kauhanganui* (Maori Parliament) elected him to succeed his father, and he was enthroned and crowned as “King”.

The principal problem affecting Maori-European relations in this period was that of Maori lands and, on 4 April 1898, in an effort to reach an agreement, Seddon met Mahuta at Waahi. On 25 October 1899 Seddon wrote to Mahuta and discussed the Maori Lands Administration Bill which became law in 1900. As a result of these negotiations, and in order to have the vast (1,000,000 acres) kingite lands available for settlement, Mahuta met Seddon privately in Wellington on 1 September 1900 when he agreed to open his lands on leasehold tenure. He also accepted seats in the Legislative Council and Ministry. Unfortunately a powerful section of the kingites was still unreconciled and nothing was done to implement the agreement. Early in 1903 Seddon paid a surprise visit to Waahi where he secured the dissident chiefs' approval. On 22 May 1903 Mahuta was summoned to the Legislative Council and joined the Ministry. He remained there until after Seddon's death, but did not join Ward's Cabinet. In 1906, in one of his rare speeches to the Legislative Council, Mahuta outlined his views on the Maori land question. “It was not sufficient”, he said, “merely to open up Maori lands for European settlement. Parliament should pass a law which would enable the Maori to work his lands.” In 1907 a great kingite convention assembled at Waahi. There, under the guidance of Tupu Tangakawa Te Waharoa, the “King” movement was revitalised and Mahuta withdrew from politics. His membership of the Legislative Council lapsed on 21 May 1910 and he was not reappointed.

Mahuta died at Waahi on 9 November 1912 and was survived by his widow, Te Mare, and five sons. He was succeeded in the “Kingship” by his eldest son, Te Rata. Mahuta was a man of fine appearance, of reserved disposition, and of very few words.

by Bernard John Foster, M.A., Research Officer, Department of Internal Affairs, Wellington.

Seddon Papers 95 (MSS) National Archives

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