

VZ (Hill, 2012)

Story: Police

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Policing before 1840

In pre-colonial society, *rūnanga* and other institutions exercised control within tribes and subtribes. Chiefs enforced customary laws, assisted by selected warriors, *tohunga* and others.

When New Zealand came into the British sphere of influence (as an extension of the New South Wales frontier) in the 1830s, the imperial authorities aimed to advance trade and commerce by creating stable conditions. Violence within and between Māori and Pākehā communities was discouraged by naval patrolling and a handful of frontier officials with scant resources.

Catskins

When Lieutenant Governor William Hobson declared New Zealand a British colony in 1840, he was accompanied by a small detachment of New South Wales mounted police, nicknamed 'catskins'. These troopers arrived before their horses, so at first they patrolled on foot along the 'main street' (the beach) of Kororāreka (later renamed Russell). Hobson appreciated the 'imposing effect which their appearance produces on the Natives'.¹ The troopers were first accommodated at mission stations, until the missionaries objected to their cutting down thriving fruit trees for firewood. They returned to New South Wales in 1842 after New Zealand ceased to be a dependency of that colony.

Colonial police, 1840–1846

When William Hobson arrived to establish the new colony of New Zealand in 1840, he was supported by heavily armed members of the New South Wales mounted police. The first officials in charge of order in the new European settlements and surrounding districts were police magistrates, who recruited teams of constables. This system was also imported from New South Wales, which had been founded as a convict settlement and was rigidly controlled. Use of military-style police was intended as a temporary measure, until a society evolved in which most people would obey most laws.

By 1840 policing was under close scrutiny throughout the British Empire. The reform of London's police in 1829 had introduced theories of policing by consent rather than by coercion. However, the new frontier of colonial New Zealand required British order to be imposed before it could be enforced, and police therefore operated more by force, especially towards Māori, than by consent. Supplemented by a small number of soldiers, they played a significant role in extending control beyond the first small coastal Pākehā settlements.

'Lawless brutal and violent'

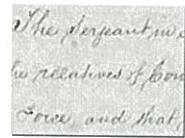
Until 1846 police magistrates commanded local police forces in European settlements and their environs. They complained that they were never given sufficient manpower or equipment to keep the peace. In 1843 Charles Robinson, a well-regarded magistrate in the Banks Peninsula town of Akaroa, arrested a notorious whaling captain named Paddy Woods. Woods had seized an American whaler and assaulted a constable. However, the arrest warrant was out-of-date and Woods, described as 'lawless brutal and violent in the extreme ... the constant object of terror and disquietude to both Natives and White men', was released.² He then sued Robinson for £1,000 for false arrest.

1846 Police Force

hearing an
accusation of
murder



Police stockade,
1849



Armed Police
Force rules, 1853



Native constable,
1850

Armed Police Force, 1846–1853

Under a new governor, George Grey, policing strategy responded to Māori uprisings in the mid-1840s by becoming more forceful, and supporting the military suppression of rebellion. The police magistracy forces were replaced in 1846 by a colony-wide Armed Police Force (APF). This was directly modelled on the paramilitary constabulary in Ireland, which at that time was a rebellious and severely policed country. The APF had formidable powers and resources to suppress disorder. Its members were disciplined young men who reported to wānanga officers rather than to magistrates. Their main task was to conduct armed surveillance patrols in both 'civilised' areas (towns and their surrounding districts) and 'untamed' (mainly Māori-controlled) areas. They were transferred frequently to new posts, on the policing principle that it was easier to order police to apply extreme force to strangers rather than to people familiar with them.

Recruitment and policing

Men were recruited to the APF for their specialist knowledge of people and terrain, and played prominent roles in policing fellow Māori. High-born males were chosen as Māori constables where possible. They were expected to learn the skills of European civilisation through living at the police barracks, and take this experience back to their tribes. In 1846 resident magistrates replaced police magistrates, often assisted in rural areas by chiefs, who might assign members of their tribes to help with policing.

Footnotes:

1. Quoted in Richard S. Hill, *Policing the colonial frontier: the theory and practice of coercive social and racial control in New Zealand, 1767–1867*. Vol. 1. Wellington: Historical Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, p. 126.
2. Quoted in *Policing the colonial frontier*, vol. 1, p. 204.

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