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Correspondence from readers and potential contributors is welcomed.

- Journal editor: Anthony Dreaver, 64 Dale Road, Raumati South
  Telephone: 04 9049970. E-mail: adreav@paradise.net.nz
- Secretary, Otaki Historical Society (Inc.): Daphne Meyer, P. O. Box 50, Otaki.
  Telephone: 06 3648507

EDITORIAL

THE MORE years we amass, the more marks they leave on us, each of them hard-won from good or bad experience. Plastic surgery is not a worthwhile option – we earned those scars and furrows, and ought to value them.

The same applies to the land. In the marks of its age we read its character. In New Zealand, unlike Europe, the marks of history are often impermanent materials – timber, earth, vegetation and soil type – all vulnerable to fire, flood and bulldozer. Preserving the land's face to show its character calls for effort, discrimination and restraint. We can't – or shouldn't – always do everything that we can. We have to set limits.

Our region, Horowhenua/Kapiti, is very distinctive, and we need to define and treasure this distinctiveness. The region depends on attracting visitors, investors and residents to what they perceive as a desirable community to live and work in. It's the character, our branding, that interests and draws them.

Kapiti/Horowhenua is marked by two cultures, the interactions between them, and the structures they've made: meeting-houses, farmsteads, pubs, churches and burial grounds. It's based on a soil made friable by windblown sand and fertile with humus laid down by peat swamp and forest. From end to end of the region you are always aware of the east-west transition from coast to mountain, cut by the north-south corridor of traffic. As guardians, caretakers, kaitiaki of this treasure-house we make decisions about which structures and which landscapes must be protected at all costs. We would all be poorer if we lost the totara remnants and stone walls of Te Horo, the sand-ridges and kanuka stands of Raumati South, the dune vegetation, river estuaries and wetlands of the coast, or the ancient sea-cliffs and islands along the skirts of the Tararua range. And we also need the reminders of past human activity: the railway buildings, the middens and eel-weirs, the cottages and mansions, courthouses, towers and monuments. Horowhenua/Kapiti is complex, bi-cultural, productive and old-established.

By publishing this journal, now in its twenty-third year, Otaki Historical Society records and interprets this region and its people. Once again we bring you stories sent to us from around New Zealand and beyond. On behalf of all readers I want to thank those who have made this sturdy enterprise possible: The writers and contributors of articles and illustrations; the generous individuals and organisations that have made financial donations; past and present committees for their boldness, faith and prudence; and all 266 members of OHS, whose loyalty and support make publishing this journal so rewarding.