



**MARKED IN STONE:** Descendants take a closer look a plaque listing the names of 42 settlers buried in the Henui Primitive Methodist Burial Ground last century. In the background, at left, is The Reverend Fatuatia Tufuga. Photo: ADRIAN MALLOCH

# Church service is final chapter in saga of 'forgotten' graves

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By **KIM BATCHELOR**

A GROUP of 19th century settlers — many of them young children, lost for many years in unmarked graves — was honoured at a special service in New Plymouth at the weekend.

The graves of 42 people buried at the Henui Primitive Methodist Burial Ground between 1847 and 1871, surrounding the Fitzroy Methodist Church on Devon St, were discovered after work began on a new carparking area.

In early 1997, contractors uncovered two skeletons alongside the church. Although there were three headstones beside the wall the church believed they were memorials to people buried elsewhere.

Investigations using radar found 21 burial sites, and research by genealogists found records of 42 people buried on the

section. Plans to move the remains to another site, which were opposed by two descendants, were abandoned.

On Saturday, in the final chapter of the story, dozens of descendants attended a memorial service and a plaque unveiling in remembrance of the pioneering Methodists buried around the church. The area has been grassed over and the three headstones re-erected.

Noel Northcott, who had three relatives buried on the site, said he spent years looking for the graves of his ancestors and was glad to see them remembered.

When he originally approached the Methodist Church he was told no one was buried around the Fitzroy church.

But, with help from Marion Wellington, of the Waitara Genealogical Society, records were tracked down and the graves discovered, Mr Northcott said.

"She deserves the credit for finding

them... They were going to sell that land and build on it, and we would have lost sight of all of these people. It's New Plymouth's early history that could have been lost if someone hadn't have roused something up. On my presenting the list to the church they had to listen."

Those buried on the site include Bainbridges, Stockmans, Robertsons and Nelsons. Many of them were just days, months or a few years old.

Church trustee Bruce Hanrahan said when the ground was in use it was a time of high infant mortality and short life expectancy.

After an 1861 public ordinance shutting down small denominational burial grounds, with the setting up of the Te Henui Cemetery, the church restricted burials on the site. But burials continued for the next 10 years for the immediate family of those already there, he said.